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STAR TRIBUNE

Date: Minneapolis, Minnesota
Edition:

Title: 10/26/2002



PAUL WELLSTONE

1944-2002

SENATOR DIES IN CRASH

Wife, daughter, 5 others killed when plane goes down

By Pat Doyle, Paul McEnroe
and Mark Brunswick
Star Tribune Staff Writers.

EVELETH, MINN. — U.S. Sen. Paul Wellstone, the Democratic populist who was known for his impassioned work on behalf of the underdog, died Friday morning when his plane crashed in woods on Minnesota's Iron Range.

All eight people aboard the plane were killed, including Wellstone's wife, Sheila Wellstone, 58, and their daughter, Marcia Markuson, 33.

The chartered twin-engine plane had left St. Paul Down-

town Airport about 9:30 a.m. Sen. Wellstone, 58, had been on his way to attend a funeral for the father of state Rep. Tom Rukavina, DFL-Virginia, when it went down about 10:22 a.m. in light snow about 1½ to 2 miles from the Eveleth airport, about 175 miles north of the Twin Cities.

The state came to a halt for a time as mourners left flowers and candles at the Wellstones' Cathedral Hill condominium, and Wellstone's campaign headquarters, both in St. Paul.

Political activity also came to a standstill as representatives from Minnesota's four major parties paid their re-

spects to Wellstone, who made an improbable journey from college professor to activist to the U.S. Senate.

Prayer services were held at the state Capitol, in Northfield, Minn., where Wellstone had taught political science at Carleton College, in Eveleth and at the College of St. Scholastica in Duluth, where the senator, who was seeking a third term, had been scheduled to debate Republican Norm Coleman and two other candidates who were challenging him for his Senate seat.

CRASH continues on A22:
— Another pilot found wreckage.

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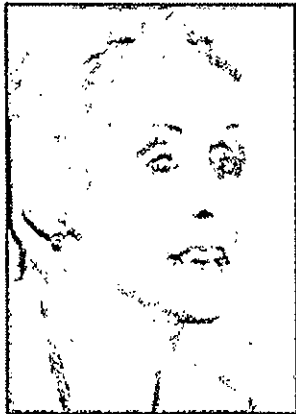
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The Wellstone-Coleman race was among the most hotly contested and closely watched in the country. Coleman announced that he would be suspending campaign activities, and said that the entire Wellstone family "has been selfless public servants who embodied the best of Minnesota."

Independence Party Senate candidate Jim Moore and the Green Party's Ray Tricomo ordered their campaigns suspended; Moore's until further notice and Tricomo's at least through the weekend.

THE CRASH VICTIMS



Sheila Wellstone

58. She was equally as passionate as her husband. She was a nationally recognized advocate on domestic violence. But foremost she was his most trusted adviser, friend and companion.



Marcia Wellstone Markuson, 33. Was a teacher.



Mary McEvoy, 49. Associate chair of the state DFL Party.



Will McLaughlin, 23. Was the energetic staff member.



Tom Lopic, 49. Was Wellstone's soft-spoken deputy state director.



Michael Guess, 30. Was co-pilot for Executive Aviation.

Capt. Richard Conry, 55. Pilot for Executive Aviation.

Candidates for the Senate and other offices canceled advertising and appearances.

Standing outside his house in St. Paul, Coleman compared their hard-fought campaign to that of two boxers who would try for a knockout and then hug at the end of their bout.

"This is a terrible day for Minnesota," he said. "Paul Wellstone and I were political opponents, and that was it. That was it. I had the greatest respect for his passion. He was a fighter. The people of Minnesota are going to miss that. I'm going to miss that."

Now, state Democratic leaders intend to choose a replacement for Wellstone on the Nov. 5 ballot. Gov. Jesse Ventura declined to say Friday whether he will appoint an interim U.S. Senator to serve until January.

Others who died in the crash were Mary McEvoy, 49, of St. Paul, a University of Minnesota professor and DFL official; campaign staff members Will McLaughlin, 23, of St. Paul, and Tom Lopic, 49, of Eden Prairie, and pilots Richard Conry, 55, of Minnetonka and Michael Guess, 30, of St. Paul.

Crash in wooded area

Township firefighters were the first to respond and were soon joined by 75 officers and rescue workers from St. Louis County and elsewhere.

A team from the National Transportation Safety Board, the FBI, and Charlie Weaver, the state's public safety commissioner, went to the crash site about 8:20 p.m. Friday, taking a convoy of 10 cars as close as they could get to the scene.

A press briefing was planned for later in the evening and more information is likely to be released today.

The FBI sent a 15-person evidence recovery team to the crash site. "When there is a U.S. senator on board we take all the precautions to make sure this was just an accident," said Paul McCabe, an FBI special agent who works in Minneapolis.

Asked whether terrorism was suspected, McCabe replied: "We have no indication nor do we have any intelligence information that would indicate this was an act of terrorism."

St. Louis County Sheriff Rick Wahlberg described the crash site, in Fayal Township, as a "typical wooded area of north-eastern Minnesota. It's very swampy, wet, a lot of pine trees. It's a real unpleasant piece of property."

A pilot who searched for the plane after it didn't arrive on schedule found it broken and burning in a wooded, swampy area southeast of the airport.

"There wasn't much left of the airplane . . . from what I could see," said Gary Ulman, an owner of Taconite Aviation, a private aviation firm at the airport. "It was engulfed in flames."

There were reports of light snow and an overcast sky during the morning, according to the FAA, the state climatology office and area residents. Visibility was about 3 miles. It's unclear if weather played a role.

FAA spokeswoman Elizabeth Isham Cory said there "didn't appear to be" any sign of distress during discussions with the plane's crew about the approach to the airport.

Ulman said the pilot of the plane called in when it was about 7 miles from the airport. He said shortly afterward, his phone rang. Air traffic control in Duluth notified him that the plane hadn't checked in.

He got into his plane to look for the aircraft.

"I was following the track that they should have been on," he said. "I saw smoke that I thought was just a chimney fire. I thought I better go check it out anyhow . . . flew over it."

Then he saw the wreckage.

The plane was burning when sheriff's deputies arrived shortly after 11 a.m. and it remained burning until at least 3:30 p.m., Wahlberg said.

Authorities said they had no plans Friday night to remove bodies of the victims, who appeared to be in the burned fuselage of the plane.

Tributes come in

Ventura ordered that flags on all state buildings be flown at half-staff through the Nov. 5 election. He said Minnesotans need to be strong and "to be strong all we have to do is remember Paul Wellstone's energy."

Said President Bush, speak-

ing from his ranch in Texas: "Paul Wellstone was a man of deep convictions. He was a plainspoken fellow who did his best for his state and for his country. May the good Lord bless those who grieve."

Wellstone's Web site, <http://www.wellstone.org>, replaced all of its campaign contents with a two-paragraph message printed on a white background. It read, in part: "Paul Wellstone was one of a kind. He was a man of principle and conviction, in a world that has too little of either. He was dedicated to helping the little guy, in a business dominated by the big guys. We who had the privilege of working with him hope that he will be remembered as he lived every day: as a champion for people."

Outside Wellstone's campaign office, people left flowers and signs in tribute to the senator, who had originally pledged to serve only two terms in Washington, D.C., but changed his mind and decided to seek a third.

A similar outpouring took place as about 2,000 people gathered at the state Capitol under overcast skies for a memorial service.

Campaign volunteers, legislators and citizens not active in politics were among those gathered for the, quickly arranged memorial.

Roger Moe, the DFL candidate for governor, urged those in attendance to do a good deed Friday, to volunteer at a homeless shelter or help someone who is out of work.

"You tell them a friend of yours died today," he said, his voice cracking. "Tell them, 'You didn't know him, but he was your friend, too.'"

Wellstone's career as an ac-

tivist started in 1972 when he helped form a group called the Organization for a Better Rice County. Along with students from Carleton, he canvassed Northfield to find out how much housing there was in the city for its low-income residents.

He invited low-income people, the elderly and sympathizers like Patti Fritz to meet so they could talk about the issues.

"We were the hands, even the brains, and Paul was the heart, the cheerleader," said Fritz, who now lives in Fari-bault and is running for the state Legislature. "He convinced us that little people like us could make things happen if we worked together, stood up for ourselves."

"He always had so much energy, so much faith in people. He just never gave up. He taught us to be tenacious."

Fritz saw Paul and Sheila Wellstone on Saturday when they attended a fundraiser for her candidacy.

"He said the same things Saturday that he did back in '73. We can do amazing things together that we can't do separately, and we have to stand up for each other. That's what he always believed. That's how he lived."

In 1990, Wellstone surprised most political observers — first by winning the Democratic party's endorsement for the U.S. Senate and then by defeating the incumbent, Republican Rudy Boschwitz.

He defeated Boschwitz again in 1996.

Lisa Pattni had arrived at the Eveleth airport at 10 a.m., making sure she was there early. She was scheduled to be Wellstone's driver for the day,

taking him to his Duluth stops and then back again to the Eveleth airport by 9 p.m. "We got there a half-hour early," said Pattni, who lives in nearby Virginia.

For more than seven years, she had been Wellstone's northern Minnesota director.

But as she briefly described her arrival and wait for an airplane that would never arrive, Pattni paused on the telephone, and said she did not want to continue talking.

At Peter's Grill in downtown Minneapolis, an entourage of 30 people led by U.S. Sen. Ted Kennedy, D-Mass., arrived at 8:30 a.m. Kennedy had been in the Twin Cities campaigning for Wellstone, and Andy Atsidakos, a co-owner of the restaurant, said someone had visited Thursday and asked if the restaurant could handle a big crowd.

"[Wellstone] was supposed to be here with Ted Kennedy, but he went off," said Peter Atsidakos, Andy's cousin and co-owner.

Later in the morning, Kennedy was speaking of his Senate colleague at Boston Scientific Corp., still unaware of the tragedy.

"Give Paul a [helping] hand," he told a gathering of workers at the company's Maple Grove facility. "He really makes a difference and we really need him in the Senate."

He said Wellstone's "strong effort and good work" was "indispensable" in passing legislation in the final moments of the most recent congressional session that will help Minnesota's \$6 billion medical device industry. The bill, which Bush is expected to sign, will streamline the regulatory process for new product approvals.

Kennedy said.

Hours later, Kennedy joined former Vice President Walter Mondale, U.S. Rep. Betty McCollum, D-Minn., and Moe in mourning the death of the Wellstones, his aides and the pilots.

"We'll miss you, Paul, and we will never forget you," Kennedy said before a throng of reporters on the street corner outside Wellstone's campaign headquarters in St. Paul.

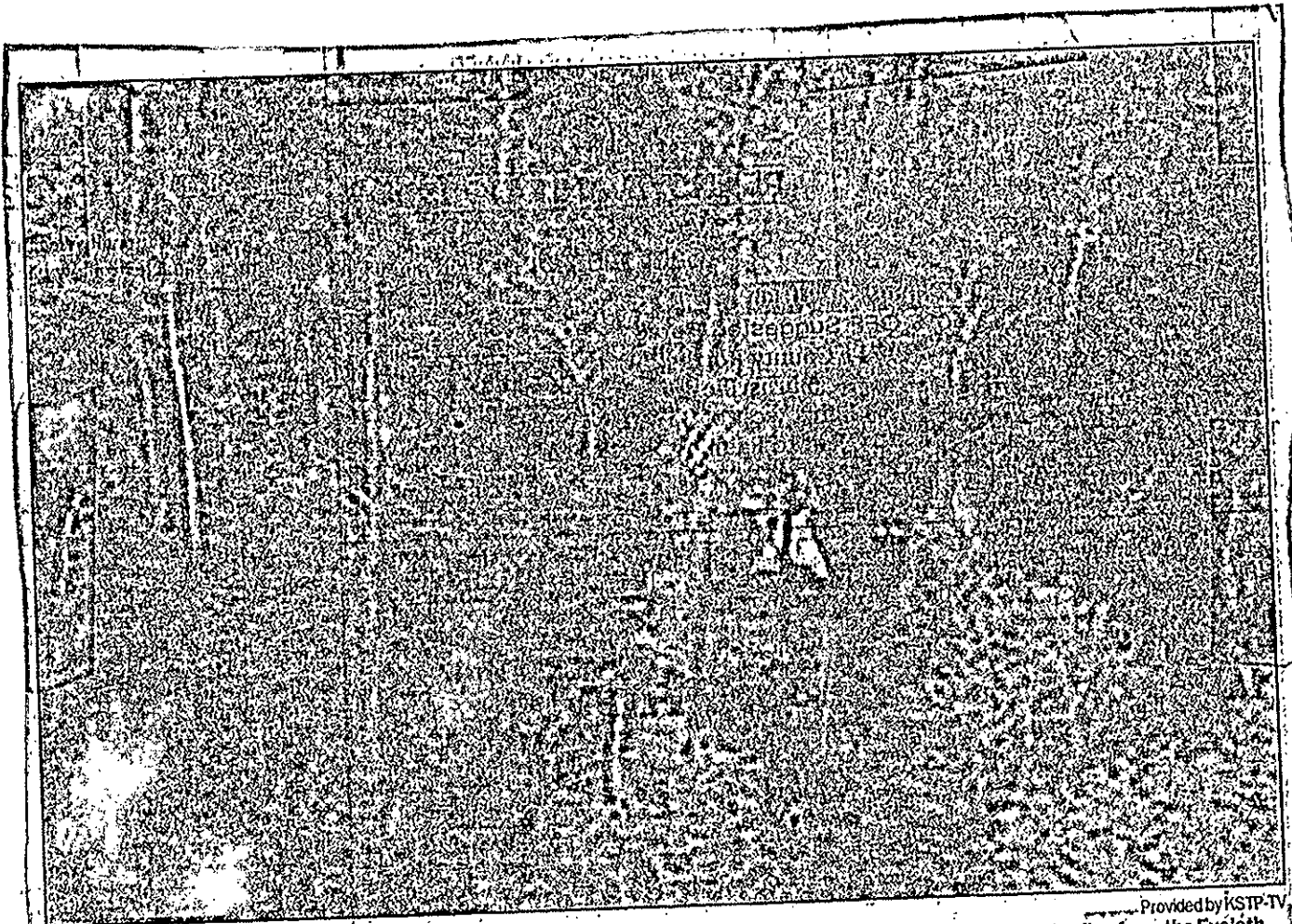
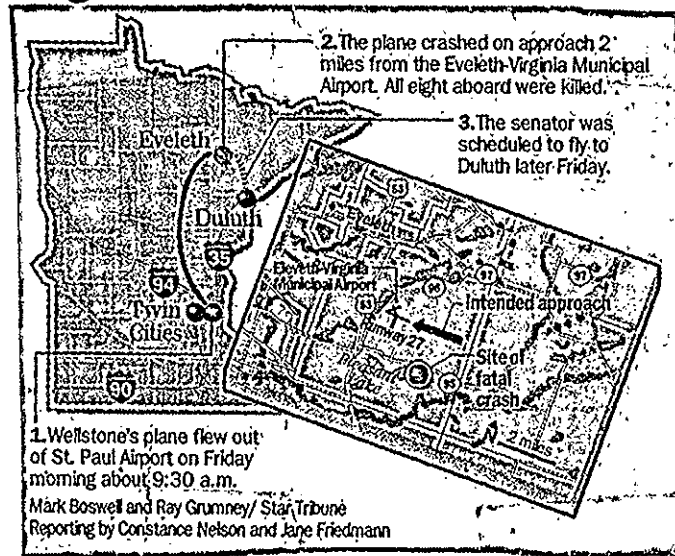
People gathered outside the headquarters as the news spread, and Kennedy and Mondale walked around the office, consoling the staff members and volunteers who were making calls and doing other tasks that are part of a campaign's final days.

"Senator Wellstone has logged tens of thousands of miles in small planes with his trusted pilot and co-pilot and a plane he has been in dozens of times," said Jeff Blodgett, Wellstone's campaign manager and a longtime confidante. "It's an Earth-shattering event. An unbelievable tragedy on so many levels. We're all grieving. The unthinkable is what it is."

In a press statement, the Green Party's Tricomo said: "I have no words to express my sorrow at this tragic turn of events. I can tell you that I admired Paul and Sheila's passion and love for the people of Minnesota. Both of them were a voice for the voiceless, and their passing will be felt deeply."

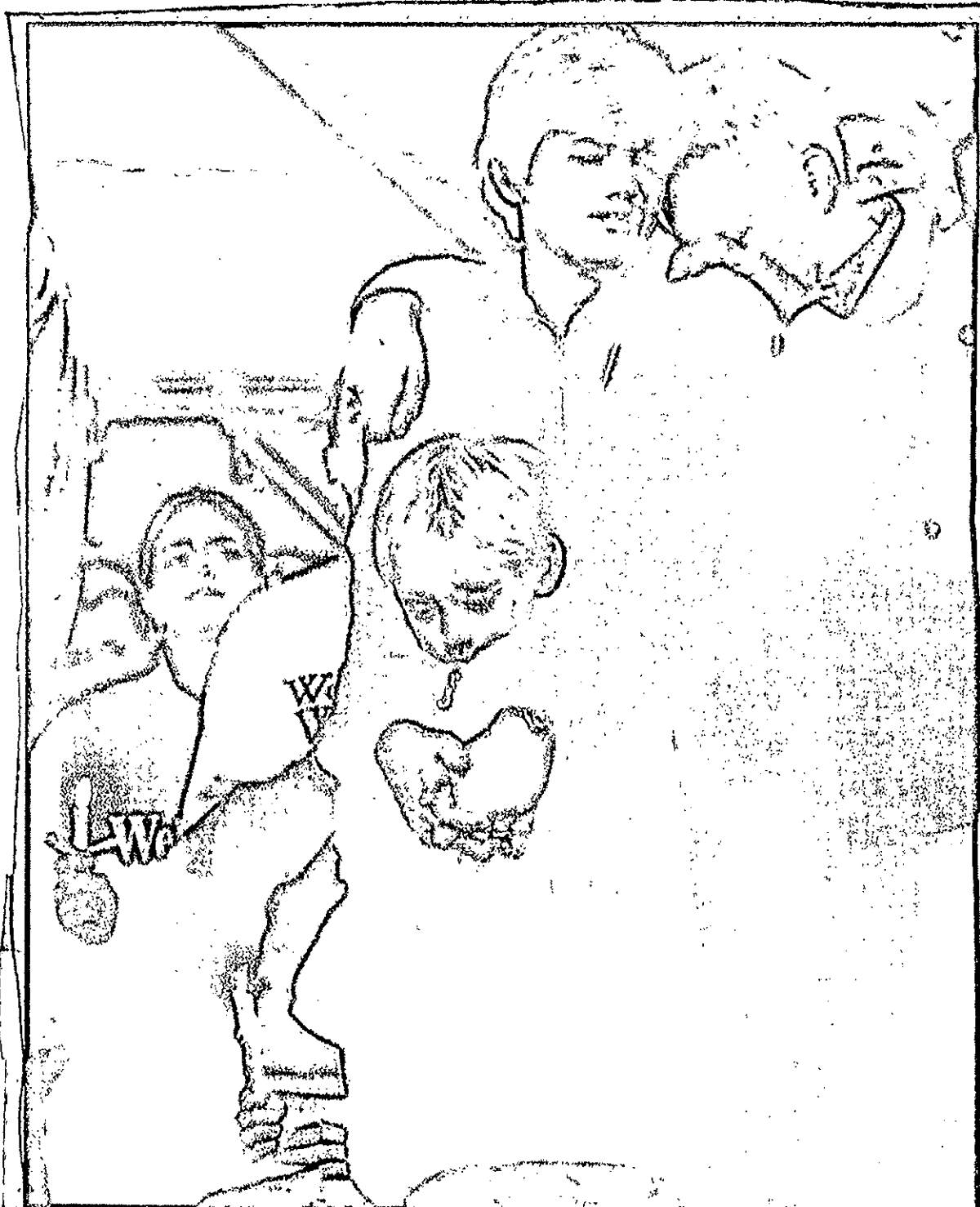
"Even if we disagreed on a number of issues, he was a true inspiration."

— The writers can be reached at StateNews@startribune.com.



A view from the air of the crash wreckage. The chartered twin-engine plane went down in light snow about 1½ to 2 miles from the Eveleth airport, about 175 miles north of the Twin Cities.

Provided by KSTP-TV



Richard Sennott/Star Tribune
At a State Capitol vigil Friday, Wellstone campaign manager Jeff Blodgett grieved with his wife, Emily, and their son, Tim.

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(Indicate page, name of newspaper, city and state.)

Date: 10/28/02
Edition:

Title: Duluth News-
Tribune

Character:
or
Classification: 149A-MP-62632
Submitting Office:

Officials focus on 'curious turn'

FEW CLUES: Investigators have found no explanation for the plane's sudden change of course after a routine flight.

BY HANNAH ALLAM, TODD NELSON,
PHILLIP PINA AND CHARLES LASZEWSKI
ST. PAUL PIONEER PRESS

The plane carrying Sen. Paul Wellstone began to drift off course at least two minutes before it crashed, the first sign of trouble in the flight and one that so far has no explanation, officials said Sunday.

With much of the plane reduced to ashes by the devastating impact and ensuing fire, investigators sifted through debris by hand Sunday, collecting even dime-sized items they hoped were clues in figuring out why the aircraft swerved and dove to the ground, killing Wellstone and seven others Friday morning. In addition to combing over maintenance records, officials are determining the condition of the engines, propellers and other equipment.

So far, the effort has yielded a few pieces of the cockpit, part of the altimeter and possibly part of another gauge.

Wellstone, 58, was headed to a funeral with his wife, Sheila, 58, and daughter, Marcia, 33. The others on board were campaign staff members Tom Lopic, Mary McEvoy and Will

See CRASH, Page 8A



JIM MONE/ASSOCIATED PRESS

Federal investigators on Sunday sift through the wreckage of the twin-engine plane that crashed near Eveleth on Friday, killing Sen. Paul Wellstone along with his wife, daughter and five others. Clues to the cause of the crash have been slow to emerge.

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CRASH | *No evidence of any problems during flight*

From Page 1A

McLaughlin; Capt. Richard Conry and co-pilot Michael Guess. All were killed.

Remains of the victims were to be released to their families as soon as autopsies are complete.

The flight, which left the Twin Cities at 9:37 a.m. Friday, had been routine until its final minutes, according to a reconstruction of the flight based on radar data reviewed by investigators from the National Transportation Safety Board.

At 10:18 a.m., the pilot got clearance to land at the Eveleth-Virginia Municipal Airport, lined up the aircraft with the runway and was heading straight west. Everything appeared routine, said Carol Carmody, acting NTSB chairwoman.

"There was no evidence on the controller's part or from the pilot's voice that there was any difficulty," Carmody said of the last conversation between the pilot and the ground. "No reported problems. No expressed concern."

Something changed in the next 60 seconds, because at 10:19 a.m. the twin-engine aircraft began drifting slightly to the south, radar showed. The last appearance on the radar came about two minutes later as the plane was just north of the crash site's east side.

"A normal landing would have continued heading straight west," Carmody said. "We find the whole turn curious."

Carmody said investigators are looking for clues concerning:



JIM MONE / ASSOCIATED PRESS

A photo of Sen. Paul Wellstone (right) and his campaign worker Will McLaughlin was placed as a memorial at the site of the plane crash that killed Wellstone; his wife, Sheila; his daughter, Marcia Wellstone Markuson; McLaughlin; and four others Friday.

■ The de-icing boots on the plane's tail and wings and whether they were working and whether the pilot had used them. At 10:01 a.m., the pilot was cleared to Eveleth and given an advisory concerning reports of icing between 9,000 and 11,000 feet.

■ The engines, removed from the crash field Sunday and taken to the airport, and to what extent they were working when the plane crashed.

■ The propellers and their condition.

■ An airport landing beacon, owned and maintained by the state, that the FAA found to be slightly out of tolerance Saturday and was retesting Sunday.

■ The plane's maintenance records and the pilots' records. Carmody said a review of the maintenance records, still incomplete, had turned up nothing unusual. She said she had received no information on the pilots.

NTSB officials estimated they would spend three to five more days on-site.

The crash site is so densely wooded that the area was dark even though the sun was shining Sunday. The plane is mostly ashes; part of the tail and part of the right wing appeared to be the only recognizable pieces.

In about a 50-foot radius around the craft, the ground was charred. Purple tape was attached to trees that had damage from the plane. One had been hit by a propeller. The descent of the plane into the trees was visible, a trail indicating a fast dive after the plane initially struck the trees.

For several pilots, Friday's tragedy brought back memories of the 1993 crash near Hibbing, in which 18 people died. In both crashes, the planes encountered bad weather and were flown by two-pilot teams of a veteran airman and a co-pilot with far fewer hours logged in the air.

After a six-month investigation into the Hibbing crash that brought out contentious details about the conduct of the pilot and inexperience of the co-pilot, the NTSB ruled the crash was caused by several factors. Among them were pilot error and the fact that the plane lacked certain pieces of safety equipment that have long been standard on larger aircraft.

What the pilots in Friday's crash discussed in their final moments will remain a mystery because the plane was not equipped with a cockpit voice recorder. Although the plane was not required by law to have one, a recorder would likely have helped investigators, who may have little to go on because of the heavy damage to the aircraft.

(Indicate page, name of newspaper, city and state.)

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Date: 10/28/2002
Edition:

Mesabi
Daily News

Wellstone's death leaves Coleman campaign in box

ST. PAUL (AP) — Sen. Paul Wellstone's death has his opponent, Republican Norm Coleman, in a tough spot.

If Coleman resumes his campaign too soon, he could face a public backlash. If he starts too late, he risks being swamped while sitting on the sidelines. Meanwhile, he's not certain who his opponent will be.

"Houdini couldn't get out of this box," said Larry Jacobs, a political science professor at the University of Minnesota. "Quite apart from his own sense of loss, which I believe is very genuine, he is hand-tied."

Coleman discussed his dilemma with reporters Sunday, standing outside in the cold about half a mile from Wellstone's campaign headquarters at a television station.

"There will be a campaign, but now is not the time," said the former St. Paul mayor.

Minnesotans still need time to grieve, he said. A memorial service is scheduled for Tuesday evening, which Coleman plans to attend. Sometime after that, a campaign will resume.

But Coleman has to scrap the past year and a half of work building a campaign against Wellstone. He also must figure out a new message against an opponent who could have a big sympathy vote.

Jacobs said Coleman should talk about Wellstone and how they differed on policy, but had similar principles. It was a path Coleman appeared to be starting down on Sunday.

"Paul Wellstone was a good man. He was my political opponent. He made me a better candidate. I loved going to those debates because his passion, his fire, he made you better," Coleman said. "In this business, you can disagree philosophically. I always believed Paul and I had the same end, we wanted the same things for families. We just disagreed how to get there."

The last poll in the race, taken shortly after Wellstone spoke out against a resolution authorizing military force against Iraq, showed Wellstone opening a slight lead in the race for the first time.

Coleman's supporters said it would be unfair for voters to blame Coleman for resuming his campaign.

"He's been utterly disarmed by something over which he has no control," said David Strom, legislative director for the Minnesota Taxpayers League. "It is an impossible position to be in."

Strom added, "If he's not out there campaigning vigorously on Wednesday morning, he's letting his supporters down."

Coleman may not know his strategy yet, but the Republican Party is preparing a message that presumes the Democrats will choose Wal-

ter Mondale to replace Wellstone.

"This is a choice between the past and the future — between someone who had had a place in the Senate decades ago and a guy prepared and ready to serve the next six years," said spokesman Bill Walsh.

With a one-vote margin in the Senate, the race also has the rapt attention of Washington, and national political figures wasted no time on Sunday burnishing the images of Coleman and his possible opponent, Mondale.

On CNN's "Late Edition," Sen. Orrin Hatch, R-Utah, praised Coleman's work as mayor of St. Paul and said he was "very highly thought of by both Republicans and Democ-

"Paul Wellstone was a good man. He was my political opponent. He made me a better candidate. I loved going to those debates because his passion, his fire, he made you better. In this business, you can disagree philosophically. I always believed Paul and I had the same end, we wanted the same things for families. We just disagreed how to get there."

Norm Coleman
Republican U.S. Senate candidate

rats."

Sen. Harry Reid, D-Nev., took exception to that, saying Coleman had conducted "the most negative, derogatory" U.S. Senate campaign.

"He, until Paul was announced dead ... stood for everything that Paul was against. He was against everything Paul was for," Reid said.

Jacobs said Coleman's future beyond the election depends on how he handles the next several days.

"He's a pretty young guy, he's got a long future ahead of him. ... It's very important at this stage that he conduct himself in an honorable way," Jacobs said. "Campaigning as usual would be a real mistake."

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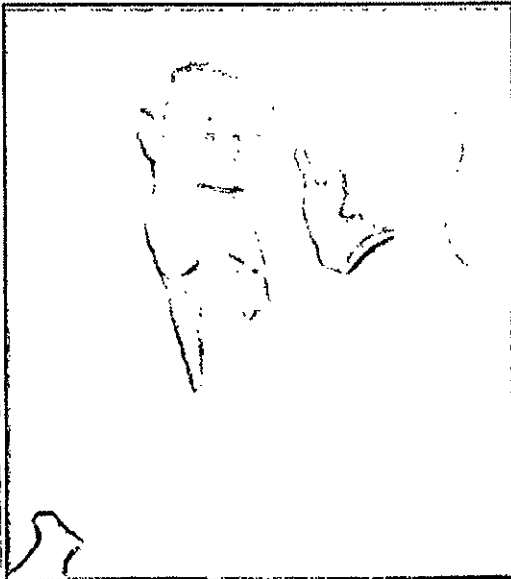
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AP photos

Republican U.S. Senate candidate Norm Coleman leaves a morning television program with his wife Laurie, in St. Paul, Minn., Sunday. Coleman was scheduled to run against Sen. Paul Wellstone, D-Minn., who died in a plane crash Friday.



Minnesota Democratic Party Chairman Mike Erlandson, left, speaks briefly with Republican U.S. Senate candidate Norm Coleman while passing during a morning television program in St. Paul, Minn., Sunday.



The State

Suspicious package at Capitol was noisemaker

ST. PAUL, Minn. (AP) — A suspicious package that a bomb squad was called to investigate Sunday at the state Capitol turned out to be a leftover noisemaker from an anti-war rally.

The bomb squad was called to the Capitol after a groundskeeper reported a suspicious tin covered in tape on the south steps of the building.

It turned out to be a coffee can with pinto beans — a leftover noisemaker from an anti-war rally Saturday at the Capitol.

"It was like the homemade noisemakers you make for your kids," said St. Paul Police Sgt. Ted Gillet.

Memorial service set for Wellstone staffer

MINNEAPOLIS (AP) — A memorial service will be held Monday for Tom Lopic, a member of U.S. Sen. Paul Wellstone's staff who was killed in a plane crash with the senator and six others on Friday.

The nondenominational service will be held at Pax Christi Catholic Community in Eden Prairie at 7 p.m.

Lopic, 49, served as Wellstone's right-hand man, prepping him for speeches and debates.

Lopic had worked with Wellstone for 10 years and quit his job as deputy director in the state Senate office two weeks ago to join the campaign full-time.

Lopic is survived by his wife, Trudy.

Star Tribune endorses Penny for governor

ST. PAUL (AP) — Editorial writers at the Star Tribune of Minneapolis endorsed Tim Penny of the Independence Party for governor.

In an editorial appearing in Sunday editions, the newspaper said it has admired Penny's leadership and Minnesota has benefited greatly from it.

Penny, a former Democratic congressman, has helped Gov. Jesse Ventura since his 1998 upset in the gubernatorial election. Penny's work with Ventura shows he'll bring a centrist approach to policy, without Ventura's bad-boy persona, the newspaper said.

(Mount Clipping in Space Below)

Impact, not fire, killed 8 in plane crash

Medical examiner lists cause of death

BY CHARLES LASZEWSKI
Pioneer Press

U.S. Sen. Paul Wellstone and the seven others killed in a plane crash Oct. 25 died from the impact, not the fire that later engulfed the plane, the St. Louis County medical examiner said Wednesday.

Dr. Thomas Uncini, St. Louis County's chief medical examiner, said he filed the death certificates Monday. In all eight cases, he listed the cause of death as "traumatic injury due to, or as a consequence of, an aviation crash with fire," he said.

The finding is not expected to have an effect on the investigation into why the crash occurred.

Uncini said his earlier examinations of the pilots had ruled out any type of medical condition such as a heart attack or a stroke. In addition,

no one suffered from a gunshot wound, he said.

"I looked," he said. "I X-rayed all the bodies and I looked for bullet fragments."

The determination took more than three weeks after the crash just outside Eveleth because the fire destroyed so much of the bodies and because he hoped the Federal Aviation Administration laboratory in Oklahoma City could work with tissue from the bodies to determine if anyone survived the initial crash.

The lab was unable to do tests on the passengers, who were more consumed by the flames than the pilots, Uncini said. He was able to obtain some blood from the pilots, and the lab confirmed there was no carbon monoxide in the blood,

CRASH INVESTIGATION, 3B

(Indicate page, name of newspaper, city and state.)

Date: PIONEER PRESS
Edition: St. Paul, Minnesota

Title: 11/21/2002

Character:
or
Classification:
Submitting Office:

Indexing:

into flame. All aboard perished, including Wellstone; his wife, Sheila; their daughter, Marcia Wellstone Markuson; campaign staff members Tom Lopic, Mary McEvoy and Will McLaughlin; and pilots Capt. Richard Conry and Michael Guess.

The National Transportation Safety Board has been investigating the cause of the crash. Paul Schlamm, a spokesman for the board, said the medical examin-

er's cause of death does not affect the investigation. There is nothing new to report on the investigation, he added, as investigators pore over the data they have collected. It will be months before the safety board issues a report.

Charles Laszewski can be reached at claszewski@pioneerpress.com or (651) 228-5458.

Crash investigation

(continued)

meaning they had died before they could inhale any smoke. Uncini concluded that all the victims died from the impact.

The plane crashed about 10:20 a.m. while making its final approach at the

Eveleth-Virginia airport in northeastern Minnesota. For some reason, the plane turned south, rather than continuing west the final several miles to the landing strip.

It crashed into a heavily wooded bog about two miles from the airport and burst

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(Indicate page, name of newspaper, city and state.)

(Mount Clipping in Space Below)

STAR TRIBUNE

Date: Minneapolis, Minnesota
Edition:

11/27/2002

Impact, not fire, likely killed Wellstone pilots

Office:

But cause of passengers' deaths isn't definite yet

By Larry Oakes
Star Tribune Northern
Minnesota Correspondent

DULUTH — The pilots killed with Sen. Paul Wellstone and five others on Oct. 25 did not die from the fire that followed the plane crash, St. Louis County medical examiner Thomas Uncini said Thursday.

However, contrary to a news report circulated Thursday, Uncini said fire has not

been ruled out as a factor in the deaths of the plane's passengers, who included Wellstone's wife and daughter, two campaign staff members and a state DFL Party official.

"I'm still working to see if the fire did contribute in some way to the deaths of some of them," Uncini said in a phone interview from his office in Hibbing.

"I think they died from the crash, but whether or not they died immediately on impact is

something I'm still working on."

Uncini said that despite the still-pending investigation, he completed death certificates Monday for all eight victims, because families need the certificates as soon as possible to proceed with settling affairs of the deceased.

CRASH continues on B7:

— Five of eight death certificates filed with state.

CRASH from B1

Five of 8 death certificates have been filed with state

However, only five of those certificates were on file with the state on Thursday. Officials said death certificates normally are passed from medical examiners to funeral directors, who add demographic information and then file the certificates with the Minnesota Department of Health, which has an electronic system shared by counties.

The five certificates filed were for Paul and Shella Wellstone; their daughter, Marcia Wellstone Markuson; copilot Michael Guess, and DFL Party official Mary McEvoy.

On each certificate the manner of death is listed as "accident," and the cause of death is listed as "traumatic injuries — secondary to aircraft crash with fire."

Uncini said he chose those

words so that they could encompass fire as a contributing factor in the deaths of the passengers, if that turns out to be the case.

On a line indicating the interval of time it took death to occur, Uncini wrote: "moments" on all five certificates. The time of death is listed as 10:30 a.m. — the approximate time the crash site was found — on all five.

Uncini previously has said that in most crashes like this one, traumatic injuries are the cause of death. He's also said that the pilots appeared to be in good health and that he didn't detect any physical ailments, gunshot wounds or other injuries that could have caused the crash.

He also has said previously that toxicology tests on chief

pilot Richard Conry were negative for alcohol or commonly abused drugs.

Uncini revealed Thursday that copilot Guess also tested negative for alcohol. However, the condition of his body made tests for other drugs or chemicals more difficult, and those tests still are pending, he said.

In his effort to determine if fire caused or contributed to the deaths of the crash victims, Uncini sent tissue samples to the Federal Aviation Administration laboratory in Oklahoma City, and asked that they be tested for the presence of carbon monoxide.

Uncini said Thursday that the lab was able to perform the test on the pilots' tissues, but not on those of the passengers.

The result for the pilots was negative, allowing Uncini to rule out fire as a cause of their deaths.

"The FAA was not able to do the passengers for me," Uncini said. "I'm trying to get them to another lab that has a process they think might work. It could take weeks."

Officials from the National Transportation Safety Board continue to investigate the crash, which occurred as the plane made its final approach to the Eyleth-Virginia airport. A report stating the probable cause of the crash is not expected for several months.

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149A-MP-62632
80-MP-C55247

Pilot worked shift night before fatal Wellstone flight

ASSOCIATED PRESS

MINNEAPOLIS — The pilot who captained Sen. Paul Wellstone's fatal flight worked a night shift at his second job as a nurse on top of a flight assignment earlier the day before the crash, the Star Tribune reported Sunday.

The newspaper said the National Transportation Safety Board is investigating Richard Conry's schedule in the days before the crash — and how it may have affected the 55-year-old's fitness to fly.

Conry's previously undisclosed four-hour nursing shift at a Twin Cities hospital ended between 9 and 10 p.m. the night before the Friday, Oct. 25 crash. That shift followed an unexpected 3-to-9:30 a.m. round-trip flight by Conry between St. Paul and Bismarck, N.D., earlier that Thursday.

The Star Tribune also said Conry's nursing job was a factor in his rejection as a part-time pilot candidate at Aviation Charter Inc. of Eden Prairie in fall 2000, according to a former chief pilot at the company. Conry eventually was hired in April 2001.

The amount of sleep Conry got before the fatal flight is important because fatigue contributes to up to one-third of all fatal transportation accidents, said Dr. Mark Mahowald, director of the Minnesota Regional Sleep Disorder Center.

Mahowald said Conry probably was impaired by an "accumulated sleep loss problem" while flying Well-

"It's hard to imagine he was not sleep-deprived."

DR. MARK MAHOWALD, director of the Minnesota Regional Sleep Disorder Center, speaking of the pilot of Sen. Paul Wellstone's fatal flight.

stone.

"It's hard to imagine he was not sleep-deprived," Mahowald said after he was told about Conry's early morning flight to North Dakota and his Thursday-night nursing work.

Conry and co-pilot Michael Guess took off at 9:20 a.m. Oct. 25 for a scheduled 14-hour trip. The trip ended in Eveleth at 10:22 a.m., when the twin turboprop King Air A100 crashed and burned 2 miles short of the runway. All eight people aboard were killed, including Wellstone's wife and daughter. The cause remains under investigation.

Dave Willman, a consultant to Aviation Charter, said he was not aware that Conry worked the night before he flew Wellstone.

"I don't believe the company knew that he had a nursing job," Willman said.

Elizabeth Isham Cory, a spokeswoman for the Federal Aviation Administration, said the 10-hour rest requirement doesn't prevent pilots from working a nonaviation job. She said it wouldn't be illegal for a pilot to work a second job, even if the work is within 10 hours of a takeoff.

(Indicate page, name of newspaper, city and state.)

Date: 11/25/2002
Edition:

Title: Duluth News-Tribune

Character:
or
Classification: 149A-MP-63
Submitting Office: 62632

Indexing:

⊗ *W/pt*

-30

Searched
Serialized
Indexed *[initials]*

(Mount Clipping in Space Below)

Probe zeroes in

on ice, fatigue

(Indicate page, name of newspaper, city and state.)

Date: PIONEER PRESS
Edition: St. Paul, Minnesota

Title: 12/5/2002

Character:
or
Classification:
Submitting Office:

Indexing:

W

Pilot's checkered past probably wasn't a factor when senator, 7 others died

BY CHARLES LASZEWSKI
and RICK LINSK
Pioneer Press

In the aftermath of the fiery crash that killed U.S. Sen. Paul Wellstone and seven others Oct. 25 near Eveleth, Minn., much of the attention, at least publicly, has focused on the troubled past of chief pilot Richard Conry.

The 55-year-old Minnetonka man's background has raised eye-

brows, including questions about his flying experience, moonlighting at a second job, a felony fraud conviction and an allegation that he sometimes treated passengers to risky maneuvers.

To many who knew Conry, his background made him a surprising choice to be flying Wellstone, his family and aides during the closing days of the Senate campaign.

Seven weeks after the crash, those familiar with such investiga-

tions and aviation safety say Conry's past problems and other idiosyncrasies are probably not to blame. Federal investigators are probably zeroing in on possible icing on the aircraft and how the chief pilot spent his final days.

The National Transportation Safety Board, which is conducting the official inquiry into the crash of the Beech King Air A100, has not publicly ruled out any cause. However, experts who have reviewed

crashes for the NTSB and the Air Force suggest the near-freezing conditions in northern Minnesota could have caused the plane to drift off course.

Paul Czysz, an aviation expert with decades of experience in plane crashes and investigations, echoed other experts when he said that if no mechanical failures are detected, icing becomes a lead suspect.

CRASH INVESTIGATION, 9A



Pilot Richard Conry "just wanted to be in the air," said one man who flew with Conry. "It's tough to believe he crashed."

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"Even a little ice can get you into a stall," said Czyns, a professor emeritus at the St. Louis University Department of Aerospace and Mechanical Engineering. "You already are at a minimal speed. In landing, an eighth of an inch (of ice) is a disaster. Ice can cover ... in the blink of an eye."

Safety board investigators already have reported that Conry and co-pilot Michael Guess were advised of icing that lay at 5,000 to 11,000 feet, and they took the plane higher to avoid it. But the ground temperature at Eveleth was only a few degrees above freezing, which Czyns said could actually worsen any icing problems. Other investigators noted that just as swimmers might suddenly hit an area of water that is noticeably colder than the rest of a lake, the same can happen in the sky.

The wings and tail of the King Air A100 are equipped with ice boots, which can be inflated to burst heavy accumulations of ice. However, they are most effective when the ice is about a half-inch thick, Czyns said.

Former NTSB Chairman Jim Hall said investigators probably are looking into the possibility of "super-cooled large droplet icing," something that has occurred in other northern climate crashes. It's a phenomenon that allows water to remain in a very cold liquid state even at temperatures in the 20s. When it hits a surface, it can quickly turn to ice, as sometimes happens on car windshields. It also is the cause of invisible "black ice" on roads.

A plane passing through such conditions would develop a clear coating of ice on the wings, which might easily go undetected by the pilot and not be thick enough for ice boots to break away. Even a thin layer of ice can severely affect the plane's performance, cutting lift and causing it to stall at normal safe speeds.

The plane was headed due west toward the runway when, minutes before landing, it inexplicably turned to the south. That turn, or roll, could have been caused by ice building up more heavily on one wing than the other, Czyns and others said. The problem would arise quickly, causing the plane to shake, rattle and roll. The pilots would have had just seconds to deal with it, which might explain why they did not radio a distress message.

ERRATIC WORK SCHEDULE

Another key facet of the investigation centers on the pilots' work schedules, both for the charter, Executive Aviation, and elsewhere during the days preceding the 10:20 a.m. Friday

crash. Of particular interest is Conry's moonlighting job as a nurse and whether his erratic work hours left him too tired to react crisply to a sudden crisis.

Many of those closest to Conry, including his wife, co-workers and the owners of Executive Aviation, declined to talk to the Pioneer Press about the pilot.

The National Transportation Safety Board has compiled a 72-hour history on Conry and on Guess, although it has not released its findings. What is known is that Conry flew from St. Paul to North Dakota and back between 3 a.m. and 9:30 a.m. Thursday. He also worked a four-hour nursing shift, overseeing acute dialysis treatment at North Memorial Hospital in Robbinsdale, ending around 9:30 p.m. Thursday.

"We shouldn't have people flying in the U.S. for profit without a voice and data recorder. The best indicator (of pilot fatigue) would have been a cockpit voice recorder."

JIM HALL,
Former NTSB chairman

One person familiar with crash investigations, who agreed to speak only if he was not identified, said that schedule should have left Conry with plenty of time to rest before flying Wellstone's group to northern Minnesota.

Czyns was less confident.

"If he was at all tired, it doesn't take much of a slip in icing conditions to bite you badly," he said. "I don't like it at all."

Hall, the ex-chairman of the safety board, said fatigue is a problem in all areas of the transportation sector, but it can't be ruled in or out in this crash because the plane had no cockpit voice recorder. Such devices are not required on smaller commercial planes including the one carrying Wellstone — a rule the NTSB has argued to change for years. Many aviation companies are reluctant to spend the \$26,000 necessary for a recorder unless it's required.

"This is a tragedy, and we

shouldn't have people flying in the U.S. for profit without a voice and data recorder," Hall said. "The best indicator (of pilot fatigue) would have been a cockpit voice recorder. A number of indicators would have shown up listening to it."

Conry's on-call nursing duties were not strenuous, said John Markus, a senior vice president for Fresenius Medical Care, the Massachusetts-based company for which Conry worked. He simply connected a patient to a dialysis machine and monitored the patient.

"The kind of work he did is just not the kind of work that would interfere with flying a plane," said Markus, who related the same information to NTSB investigators.

Conry only worked three shifts for Fresenius in October, Markus added. "He worked for us quite a lot several years ago" before shifting to a more occasional role, the company official said.

HOW GOOD A PILOT?

Conry grew up flying with his father and had his own plane by the early 1980s. He pursued a full-time flying job after real estate fraud charges ended his construction business.

According to Executive Aviation, which hired him in April 2001, Conry had logged just under 5,200 hours of flying time. He had an airline transport pilot certification, the highest possible rating. Guess, the co-pilot, was certified as a commercial pilot and had about 650 flight hours.

Rod Ahlsten, who gives pilots "check rides" part time at Executive Aviation, said he was told Conry was a good pilot. Twice a year, pilots take check rides, an extensive test consisting of an oral test, preflight checks and about two hours in the air, including some maneuvers in which emergency situations are simulated.

Conry passed his check ride the week of the crash, and Ahlsten spoke to the pilot who conducted Conry's test.

"I've heard nothing but good about his flying skills," Ahlsten said.

Several people who flew with Conry praised him, including Curt Anderson, a carpenter for Conry's defunct development

business.

Anderson said Conry also owned a stunt plane, in which he could fly upside down and perform loops. But he left the stunts behind when flying his usual single and double propeller planes, said Anderson, who flew with Conry about 40 times.

"His dream after construction was to fly," Anderson said. "He just wanted to be in the air. It's tough to believe he crashed."

In recent weeks, Conry's record has been marred by reports he overstated his experience when applying to Executive Aviation. Even in his 1990 federal trial related to a construction scheme, a prosecutor accused him of exaggerating his status with American Airlines, saying Conry was only a trainee, not a pilot flying passengers.

"I'm not what's called 'on the line,' but I'm still the right-hand-seat pilot," Conry insisted, suggesting his role at the time was that of a co-pilot.

Conry never had the opportunity to fly passengers for American. After his fraud conviction, the company asked him to leave, his lawyer said at his sentencing hearing.

At least two former acquaintances share a not-so-fond memory of a plane ride with Conry. The pair, in separate interviews, told the Pioneer Press that Conry deliberately stalled his plane in midflight to scare a traveling party in the mid-1980s.

Julie Olson, a former real estate agent, said the incident happened as Conry was flying her and two others in a small plane from Eden Prairie to a scheduled lunch in Faribault. At the time, Conry was building homes in Eden Prairie.

About halfway to Faribault, the plane stalled, Olson said. It only lasted a few moments, but it was frightening. "I thought the plane was in trouble," she said. "I thought maybe we were going to crash, that there was a mechanical problem or something."

Then the plane stabilized. Conry was laughing, she said.

John Ziebarth, a second passenger, also remembered the plunge. But unlike Olson, he said Conry first asked the passengers for permission to perform the stunt.

"I do remember him saying that's the way they do it, that's

the way they train. It still scared me to death," Ziebarth said.

Ziebarth said he had flown with Conry several times before and regarded him as an "excellent" pilot. Ziebarth once brought his three young children aboard, he said.

About halfway to

Faribault, the plane

briefly stalled, Olson

said. "I thought the plane

was in trouble," she said.

"I thought maybe we

were going to crash, that

there was a mechanical

problem or something."

Then the plane

stabilized. Conry was

laughing, she said.

Czys was concerned by the story of the intentional stall. But he and others were unsure that that incident, Conry's criminal record or the fact that Conry had worked as a nurse the night before would have any relationship to the Eveleth crash.

"I've known test pilots, and they don't try to show off," said Czys. "It's all business. It may not have any effect at all (on the crash), but it is a casualness you don't like."

CHECKERED PAST

At a memorial service the week after the crash, friends and family described Conry as a gentle person always willing to help others.

Minnetonka lawyer Bill Henney was hired by Conry in the mid-1980s when his development company started running into legal problems. While never a close friend, Henney grew to know both Conry and his wife socially.

"He was a kind, gentle, thoughtful, caring, planning type of individual," Henney said. "It's a little disturbing to see all the negative press about this guy."

But in the weeks since the accident, another portrait has begun to take shape: the Dick Conry who would mislead, overreach or exaggerate.

He grew up in the Lake Minnetonka area and studied business at the University of Minnesota and Mankato State University. In 1972, Conry decided to follow in his late father's footsteps and join the construction business.

For 16 years, he built hundreds of homes. His downfall started in the mid-1980s when he was sued over a complex series of transactions between three businesses he set up. Subcontractors had built homes for the Conry companies but were not paid. Then they found their legal means to recover were blocked by Conry's maneuvers.

Conry lost a civil suit brought by one of the subcontractors, then was convicted on federal mail fraud charges related to the scheme. He was sentenced to two years in prison and five years of probation.

He also was ordered to pay restitution to 16 companies and people totaling \$204,002. He paid only \$3,130 before the checks stopped arriving in the clerk of court's office in 1998, according to court records.

Conry's business dealings also caused a rift within his family. Conry's lone sibling, Patricia Dickey, opposed his plans to build homes on land inherited from their father. An ardent environmentalist, Dickey at one point even sued Conry and their mother, Loretta Fritz. Dickey was estranged from her brother for 18 years.

"I just didn't agree with his business practices. But he was a very good pilot, at least from what I hear," she said.

Dickey predicted her brother's troubles will be proved irrelevant when the Wellstone plane's last moments are finally understood.

"You can go back and look at anybody's life," she said. "But the question is: Did he make a mistake, or did something happen to the plane? The NTSB will just have to get to the bottom of it."

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(Indicate page, name of newspaper, city and state.)

(Mount Clipping in Space Below)

Engines,

Date:
Edition:

PIONEER PRESS
St. Paul, Minnesota

Title:

12/18/2002

propellers worked fine

NTSB rules out some equipment failure as cause of plane crash

BY CHARLES LASZEWSKI
Pioneer Press

The two engines and the propellers were working properly and did not contribute to the plane crash that killed U.S. Sen.

Paul Wellstone and seven others, federal investigators said Tuesday.

The National Transportation Safety Board dismantled and examined the equipment and found "no evidence of preimpact

engine or propeller failure" before the plane crashed into a bog about two miles from the Eveleth, Minn., airport Oct. 25.

In addition, the records on the Beech King Air A100 revealed no outstanding maintenance items, according to a statement issued by the safety board. It was the first such update since investigators left the crash site in late October.

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As a result, the crash investigation now will focus on three things: the weather and icing conditions, pilots Richard Conry and Michael Guess, and whatever clues are gleaned next week from a simulated re-creation of the ill-fated flight.

The NTSB also said for the first time that Conry was flying the plane. Investigators said tape recordings revealed that co-pilot

Guess handled nearly all the conversations with air traffic controllers, a duty that normally falls to the pilot not at the controls.

The Pioneer Press reported Sunday that crash experts expected the investigation to focus on icing, a prediction supported by the NTSB on Tuesday.

Specialists at the National

Next week, investigators will try to re-create the last few minutes of the flight using a simulator at FlightSafety International, a Wichita, Kan., flight-training facility. The NTSB will attempt to replicate the flight path, visibility and cloud conditions to learn what might have caused the plane to veer off course and crash.

Radar showed the King Air traveling at an unusually slow speed as it approached the Eveleth airport, something that has puzzled investigators. The simulator tests could reveal whether that might have been sufficient to put the plane into a stall.

Toxicology tests by the Federal Aviation Administration's Civil Aeronautical Medical Insti-

tute found that neither pilot had alcohol or illegal drugs in their systems.

Investigators have finished documenting the crew's activities during the 72 hours before the crash. They have interviewed Conry's wife, Guess' fiancée and Guess' mother. The safety board did not release details of those findings and is still looking at the employment, pilot and medical records of the two men.

Schlamm said the investigators did not indicate whether Conry's work schedule was a concern. Just 24 hours before flying Wellstone, Conry had flown to North Dakota and back. He also worked a four-hour stint as a dialysis nurse at a local hospital the evening before the campaign trip to northern Minnesota.

Schlamm said investigators are still evaluating whether that

schedule might have left the pilot fatigued or affected his ability to respond to a crisis.

Michael Padden, the lawyer representing Guess' parents, said Guess' mother told investigators that Guess had visited her the night before the crash, and he had been excited about flying Wellstone the next day. He had a routine week, she told the NTSB.

The safety board is not expected to release anything further until some time next year, when it will make public all of the material gathered during the investigation. Schlamm would not speculate when that might be. But given the pace of previous investigations, it would most likely happen next spring.

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Center for Atmospheric Research in Boulder, Colo., will work with the safety board investigators to "more accurately define the icing conditions that existed along the flight's route," according to the NTSB statement.

Icing, precipitation and other factors can be dramatically different at different altitudes, different locations and at different times, said NTSB spokesman Paul Schlamm.

"The degree of icing can be absent or it can be there, but in different degrees," he said. "It's not constantly there, and the degree is not the same. They will try to create a picture at all levels."

80-MP-C55248 (W)
149A-MP-62632-10

(Indicate page, name of newspaper, city and state.)

STAR TRIBUNE

Date:
 Edition: Minneapolis Minnesota

12/18/2002

Title:

Character:
 or
 Classification:
 Submitting Office:

Indexing:

CWoo

(Mount Clipping in Space Below)

Pilots, not plane, now a focus of probe

NTSB finds no evidence of engine failure in Wellstone crash

By Tony Kennedy and Paul McEnroe
 Star Tribune Staff Writers

Lacking evidence of mechanical failure in the plane crash that killed Sen. Paul Wellstone, federal investigators said Tuesday that they're looking at what role human factors may have played in the accident.

One focus centers on the workload of the two pilots as they made their final approach through cloud cover and near-freezing conditions, the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) said Tuesday. Investi-

gators have finished looking into the backgrounds of the two pilots and how they spent the final 72 hours before the Oct. 25 flight, the NTSB said.

Starting next week, the NTSB said, investigators will use a computer simulator in Wichita, Kan., to re-create the final approach of the Wellstone flight in the same visibility and cloud conditions that existed that day. In part, the simulations will "assess pilot activities and workload," the NTSB said in a written update of its eight-week-old investiga-

tion.

The Beechcraft King Air A100 carried no cockpit voice recorder or flight-data recorder. None was required. With its landing gear deployed, the plane drifted off its westerly course with no distress call, crashing at a steep angle just 2 miles southeast of the Eveleth-Virginia Municipal Airport.

WELLSTONE continues on A23:

Both engines and propellers appear to have been operating at time of impact, NTSB says.



Sen. Paul Wellstone was killed in a plane crash Oct. 25 near Eveleth along with seven others.

Found at a 90-degree angle to the runway, the cockpit and fuselage were severely damaged by impact and fire, destroying possible forensic evidence. The crash killed all eight people aboard, including Wellstone's wife, Sheila, their daughter, Marcia Wellstone

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Markuson; DFL Party official Mary McEvoy; Wellstone aides Will McLaughlin and Tom Lopic, and the two pilots.

As investigators reconstruct the final moments of the flight, they will try to determine why the plane's final recorded speed was only 85 knots, a dangerously low speed for a fully loaded King Air flying in possible icing conditions. Experienced pilots and crash investigators have been left to wonder how Wellstone's cockpit crew got into the notorious "low-and-slow" predicament.

Retired NTSB investigator Chuck Leonard said Tuesday in an interview that 85 knots would be very close to the plane's stall speed, the speed at which the airplane would lose its aerodynamic lift and spin down. Pilots can recover from such stalls, but not at low altitude. Wellstone's plane descended below clouds 400 to 700 feet above the ground.

"Eighty-five knots is right close to its lowest performance level," Leonard said. At that speed, "they can lose it in a big hurry."

U.S. Rep. Collin Peterson, D-Minn., who is a private pilot, said in an interview that the pilots "should have been at 120 or 130 [knots], especially during icing. If you get that slow and you've got any ice at all, you are going to stall."

The NTSB didn't comment beyond its written update, which did not speculate about the cause of the crash. NTSB spokesman Paul Schlamm said the agency won't attempt to analyze the probable cause until after the fact-finding phase.

Leonard said he won't be surprised if the NTSB, in the end, is unable to determine the accident's probable cause.

From 1983 to 1999, the NTSB was unable to determine a probable cause in 11 air-charter accidents. During the same period, the agency was able to determine the probable cause or contributing factors in 278 air-charter accidents. Among those, pilot error was cited 213 times as the cause of the accident or as a contributing factor.

"They won't grope for a cause if they don't have any clear evidence," he said.

No engine failure

In Tuesday's update, the NTSB said it closely inspected the two engines on Wellstone's chartered plane, which was operated by Eden Prairie-based Aviation Charter Inc. Consistent with indications at the crash site, the engine "tear-downs" provided no evidence of engine failure.

"Both the engines and propellers appear to have been operating at time of impact," the NTSB said.

Other updates in the NTSB release included the following:

➤ Capt. Richard Conry and co-pilot Michael Guess received two weather briefings before takeoff from St. Paul Downtown Airport.

➤ Specialists at the National Center for Atmospheric Research will help the NTSB more accurately define icing conditions on the flight's route. Schlamm said the specialists are used often by the NTSB when icing is a concern.

➤ Toxicological tests on

Guess and Conry indicated no evidence of alcohol or "drugs of abuse."

➤ The Eveleth airport's primary navigational aid has been slightly out of tolerance, but its accuracy "is suitable for en route flight."

Tuesday's report also indicated that Guess' voice is heard on "nearly all radio transmissions" with air traffic controllers. "Typically, the pilot working the radio is not the flying pilot," the NTSB said.

However, Schlamm said investigators haven't said whether Guess' voice was on the last transmission acknowledging clearance for final approach.

The question is important because it indicates who was most likely at the controls at the end. Co-pilot Guess had 650 total flying hours. Conry, the captain, claimed 5,200 total flying hours, although he had exaggerated his experience in turboprops when he was hired at Aviation Charter.

Vig, a flight dispatcher for Mesaba Airlines in the Twin Cities, said he told NTSB investigators that moderate icing was prevalent in northern Minnesota on the day of the Wellstone crash.

Vig said the icing wasn't a problem for Mesaba's pilots and shouldn't have been a problem for pilots experienced in those conditions. In addition, the King Air was equipped with de-icing equipment.

Leonard, the retired NTSB investigator, said icing could be listed in the final NTSB report as a contributing factor in the crash. But just as likely, he said, the NTSB could rule that fatigue was a factor.

Without his employer knowing, Conry, 55, worked the night before the Wellstone flight at his second job as a dialysis nurse. He also had been summoned in the wee hours of the morning, on the day before the Wellstone trip to pilot an unexpected round-trip flight from St. Paul to Bismarck, N.D.

"They may throw fatigue in there," Leonard said. "It certainly is a mix."

The NTSB didn't disclose any of its findings on the activities of Conry and Guess in the 72 hours that preceded the Wellstone flight. It still is reviewing employment, pilot and medical records of both men.

Dayton's decision

Meanwhile, Sen. Mark Dayton has decided he no longer will fly with Aviation Charter. On Monday, Dayton's staff cited safety concerns and still-unanswered questions surrounding the Wellstone crash as reasons why he dropped the charter.

Dayton will fly around Minnesota on planes operated by Elite Air Charter, a company that operates under Anoka Air Charter's certificate.

Elite Air is the same charter used by Sen.-elect Norm Coleman.

Dave Willman, an aviation consultant to Aviation Charter, said the company had no comment on Dayton's decision.

— Staff writer Greg Gordon contributed to this report.

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(Indicate page, name of newspaper, city and state.)

STAR TRIBUNE

Date: Minneapolis, Minnesota
Edition:

(Mount Clipping In Space Below)

12/22/2002

Logbook offers

intriguing details



Michael Guess was copilot on the Oct. 25 flight.



Richard Conry was the pilot.

Wellstone captain often let less-experienced colleague fly

By Tony Kennedy and Paul McEnroe
Star Tribune Staff Writers

The captain on Sen. Paul Wellstone's fatal flight had put his less-experienced copilot at the controls on at least two previous Wellstone flights, according to documents ob-

tained by the Star Tribune.

The detailed private logbook of copilot Michael Guess supports the possibility that Guess, rather than Capt. Richard Conry, was at the controls when Wellstone's charter plane went down Oct. 25, killing all eight people on board.

As investigators focus on the pi-

lots' roles and workloads while they were on approach to the Eveleth-Virginia Municipal Airport in low cloud cover, possible icing conditions and light snow, the logbook could provide a piece of the puzzle. The National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) has not said whether its investigators know who was fly-

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ing when the twin turboprop plane went down without a distress call. The logbook shows that Guess liked flying with Conry because Conry allowed him to take the controls often and build up his hours of flying time, including takeoffs and landings.

PILOTS continues on B8.

Departed DLH for RST with Lifesource. It is awesome flying with Capt. Conry. He lets me fly most of the time. FAB Part 135 STC - Aviation Charter

Departed MML for MVE with Wellstone and Staff. The pressure was on because it was my leg to fly. The landing was good. FAB Part 135 STC - Aviation Charter

199A-MP-62632
80-MP-C55247

"It is awesome flying with Capt. Conry. He lets me fly most of the time," Guess wrote in an entry about a flight he shared with Conry last year on Christmas Day.

Guess, who had just 300 hours of turboprop flying experience at the time of the crash, was fixated on building as much time as possible at the controls. His dream of becoming a pilot for a major airline would require thousands of hours as "pilot in command."

"It is like a piece of gold," Guess, 30, wrote in describing the importance of the opportunity.

All pilots keep logbooks to document their flight experience. Guess' book, which he kept in a safe at his girlfriend's house, includes self-assessments of his landings, admissions that he needed to improve and notes about the pressure he felt when Wellstone and his staff were passengers.

It is not unusual for copilots to take the controls at the discretion of the captain, and other captains also let Guess fly. When they aren't at the controls, copilots help with navigation, handle radio communications and perform safety checks.

Guess' handwritten logbook contains descriptions of four separate trips that paired Guess and Conry, including a charter for Wellstone on Jan. 15, 2002.

On that day, Conry assigned Guess to fly four of the six legs. The plane had no passengers on two of those legs, but Guess was at the controls on two of the four legs that carried Wellstone, the logbook shows.

The importance of his passengers didn't escape him.

When they departed from the St. Paul Downtown Airport with the senator on board and Conry at the controls.

Guess later wrote, "We were under pressure, but we did everything good."

Of the **O**ut leg with the senator, from Marshall to Montevideo, Guess wrote, "The pressure was on because it was my leg to fly. The landing was good."

On that same day, returning with Wellstone to downtown St. Paul from Redwood Falls, Guess wrote, "I flew the entire leg."

There's no other mention in the logbook of Guess flying with Wellstone. St. Paul attorney Michael Padden said Guess was an excellent pilot. "He was licensed, and it was perfectly legal for him to be flying paying passengers," said Padden, who is representing Guess' mother, Marie Guess.

Yet Guess' relative inexperience has drawn attention. Jeff Johnson, an aviation professor at St. Cloud State University and an airline transport pilot, said he was taken aback to learn after the crash that Guess had only 650 total hours of flying experience.

"Anything less than a thousand hours, you're kind of in the trainee stage," Johnson said. "I was just surprised to see that the first officer [Guess] had 650 hours of flight time and he's the second pilot here flying a U.S.

senator."

Johnson, who has about 3,000 hours of total flying experience, flew charter flights for U.S. Sen. Charles Hagel, R-Neb., during Hagel's 2000 campaign. He said Hagel's staff insisted on two experienced pilots.

"If he [Guess] was still learning the ropes... that can actually increase the workload because now the captain's actually spending time not only flying the airplane, but training the other pilot," Johnson said.

Youthful exuberance

Guess penned his final entry Oct. 22, about a trip from Baudette.

"An excellent opportunity to get PIC [pilot-in-command] time," he wrote. "My landing was good. Overall, this was a good flight."

Entries throughout the logbook show a boyish exuberance by Guess over his budding flying career. The book also includes passages where he reveals his own shortcomings.

Just two weeks before the fatal flight with Wellstone, Guess struggled with a landing in St. Paul. He was returning from Baudette.

"Unfortunately, my landing wasn't as smooth as it is normally," Guess wrote. "Well, even Michael Jordan misses a slam dunk sometimes."

The mere sight of other planes would sometimes merit a comment in his book, which reads like a series of postcards.

"When we taxied out, I noticed that the Air Guard had 10 F-16 Vipers parked on the

ramp. Very Cool!!!" Guess wrote about a flying trip he copiloted in April 2002.

In a frank self-assessment one year ago, Guess acknowledged in his logbook how important it was for him to gain experience in the Beechcraft King Air A100 — the exact model of plane that Wellstone went down in.

"More experience in the 100 series is very important," he wrote in reference to a landing he made Sept. 13, 2001.

Besides Wellstone, the accident killed his wife, Sheila; their daughter, Marcia Wellstone Markuson; DFL Party official Mary McEvoy; Wellstone aides Will McLaughlin and Tom Lopic, and Conry and Guess.

Last week, the NTSB said it will try to replicate the flight in a simulator to assess "pilot activities and workload" during the final approach. Contrary to some published reports that placed Conry at the controls on the plane's final approach, the NTSB intentionally has not said who it believes was flying the twin turboprop airplane through the clouds and light snow that hung over the Iron Range that day.

While the NTSB is many months away from determining the probable cause of the

accident, possible pilot error has emerged as a focus of the investigation.

Just before the crash, the King Air A100 was drifting off course at a ground speed of 85 knots, about 425 feet above the ground. Aviation experts wonder how Wellstone's plane ended up so "low and slow" — a common precipitator of deadly stalls.

The NTSB said last week that Guess' voice is heard on "nearly all radio transmissions" with air traffic controllers. Typically, that would mean Conry was flying because nonflying pilots usually handle the communications.

But when pressed by the Star Tribune, the NTSB spe-

cifically did not say who was on the radio when the plane requested clearance for final approach.

"We stopped short of saying the captain [Conry] was flying," said NTSB spokeswoman Lauren Peduzzi.

Guess, a resident of St. Paul's Frogtown neighborhood who graduated from Cretin-Derham Hall High School in 1991, aspired to climb out of the air charter business but reveled in his low-paying job at Aviation Charter Inc., the Eden Prairie company that operated the Wellstone flight. The on-call work was the ticket he needed to advance, through experience. At Northwest Airlines, for example, pilots can't even be considered for jobs until they have a minimum of 3,000 hours.

"It is definitely apparent that I can't get enough of flying," he wrote in his logbook Sept. 18, about five weeks before he died. "I will not trade my flying career for anything."

According to the logbook, Guess compiled about 300 hours of multiengine flying time since July 2001, when he first flew passengers for Aviation Charter. He came to the company with about 400 hours of total flying time, mostly on noncommercial

flights and in single-engine planes. According to the logbook, Guess' background included a short stint in 1999 hauling jumpers for a skydiving firm in Hutchinson.

An Aviation Charter pilot who mentored Guess in the last year described him as a "good, hardworking kid."

But the pilot told the Star Tribune that Guess — while proficient at cockpit radio skills — still needed coaching on landings and takeoffs when he was assigned as "pilot in command." The pilot, who is favorably mentioned in Guess' logbook, asked not to be identified out of concerns for his job security at Aviation Charter.

If investigators determine Guess was at the controls at the time of the crash, Padden, Marie Guess' lawyer, said he probably would be unable to prove in a lawsuit that Conry was negligent. "That is, if Mike was the flying pilot and he was operating the plane too low and too slow," Padden said.

Until the NTSB investigation is complete, Aviation Charter has said it no longer will comment on the Wellstone accident. The crash in Eveleth was Aviation Charter's second fatal plane wreck in five years.

In December 1997, an Aviation Charter pilot erred on approach to a foggy runway in Colorado Springs, the NTSB has said. The King Air A100 crashed 500 to 600 feet to the runway's side. The lone pilot died along with a Northwest Airlines mechanic who was on board as a passenger.

Marie Guess said her only child was so passionate about flying, he would often spend his spare time parked along Minneapolis-St. Paul International Airport, watching takeoffs and landings and dreaming about flying the big jets for a living.

As a young boy, he talked about wanting to be a firefighter or train engineer. But at the age of 10 or 11, he fixat-

ed on becoming a pilot.

As an adult, he was active in the Golden Eagles, a group of black pilots who work to get black teens interested in aviation careers.

Marie Guess, who grew up poor in Louisiana, said Michael didn't drink, smoke, use drugs or hang out in bars.

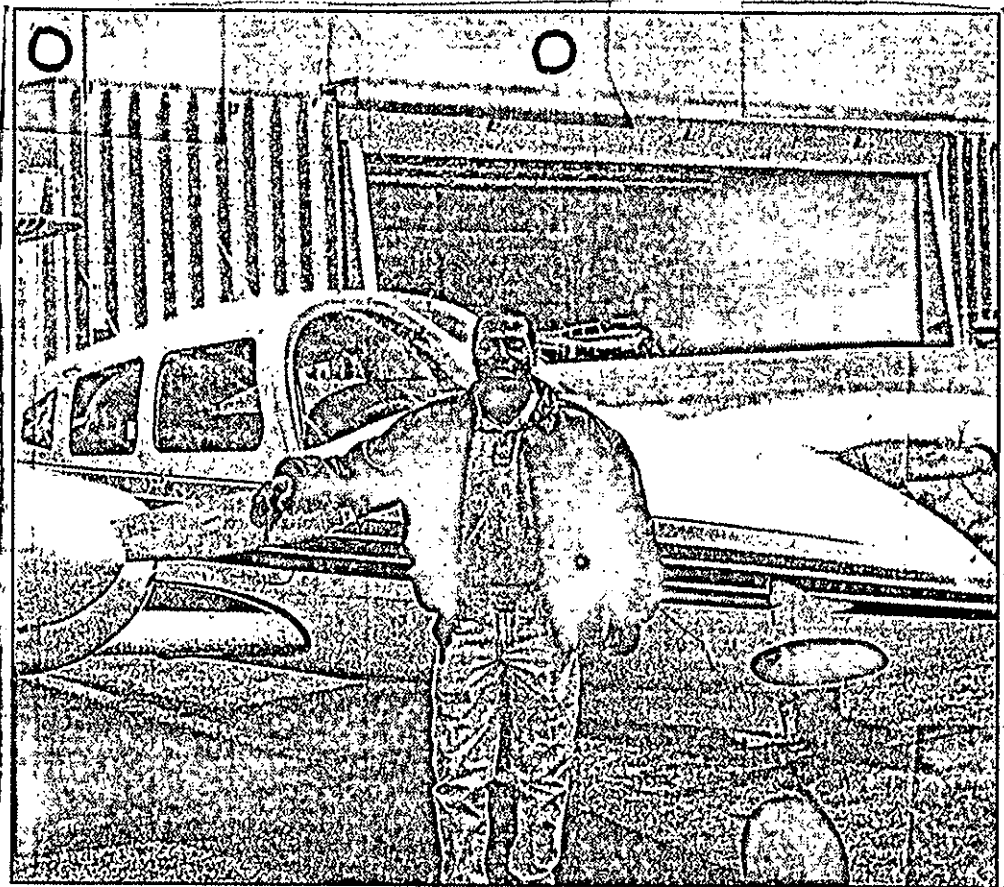
"He knew not to go out in the streets," she said. "He was not a bit of trouble, ever. He was a good boy."

She said she was strict with her son because she didn't want him to waste his education while she supported him by working at a 3M plant.

But being single-minded about aviation didn't necessarily make it an easy road, Marie Guess said.

She said her son worked numerous side jobs and had school debts from the University of North Dakota, where he received a bachelor's degree in aerospace and his pilot's license in 1997.

"No scholarships," she said. "We had to pay all the way."



Provided by the family of Michael Guess

Michael Guess had a dream of becoming a pilot for a major airline. "It is definitely apparent that I can't get enough of flying," he wrote in his logbook about five weeks before he died.

Most of Guess' income came from a nonflying job at Pan Am Flight Academy in Eagan, but he had been demoted to a job as receptionist and was laid off before the crash, Marie Guess said. She said her son's demotion didn't have anything to do with his aviation skills.

Before working at Pan Am, Guess worked in the flight-training business at Northwest Airlines. His mother said he voluntarily left the company over a dispute with his boss about a schedule conflict that involved other employment.

To subsidize his flying interest, he also had worked as a mail sorter for the Postal Service and as an airport screener for a security firm, his mother said.

"He didn't complain about money," she said.

For Guess, the hard work and low pay seemed only to be a rite of passage for the day he could make his living in the air. "Living The Dream," is how he put it in his logbook last summer.

—The writers are at pmcenroe@startribune.com and tonyk@startribune.com.

1-4

Paul Wellstone: why take him out?

In my last column ("Paul Wellstone: more questions, fewer answers", *Reader Weekly*, 9 January, 2003, pp. 12-13), I explained how the FBI was on the scene of the crash by noon, as reported by St. Louis County Sheriff Rick Wahlberg: Which means that, since this contingent came from Minneapolis, it must have departed from the city no later than 9:28 AM to make it to Duluth around 10:50 AM and arrive at the scene by noon. Remarkable, considering the crash only occurred at 10:20 and was verified at 11:00.

These agents are truly special. Their powers of anticipation defy explanation. Indeed, Wellstone's plane only departed from St. Paul at 9:30! So they were heading north to cover a crash that had yet to occur at approximately the same time that the plane they were going to cover was taking off! Anyone with predictive abilities of this caliber is wasting their time with the FBI. They should be investing in stock, running a betting emporium or, better yet, picking tickets for the lottery. They would make a bundle!

Of course, they might be making a bundle already. Who am I to say? Shenanigans by the FBI are nothing new. They knew that JFK had been killed by a lone assassin before the smoke had cleared in Dealey Plaza. That was in the past. More recently, a St. Paul man says the FBI set him up (*Duluth News Tribune*, 9 January 2003, p. 4C). The victim, who was born in India, claims they gave him a plane ticket to Hong Kong and arrested him there after engaging him in an alleged terrorist plot to trade drugs for weapons.

I know enough about the FBI to find this claim highly plausible, especially during the reign of



Jim Fetzer

Reader Weekly

John Ashcroft, Attorney General extraordinaire, who specializes in depriving American citizens of their enumerated rights under the Constitution, which he is now in the process of dismembering. Anyone remember the USA Patriot Act, which compromises your and my rights to legal representation, to freedom from unreasonable search and seizure, from detention without formal charges, and other basic elements of the Bill of Rights?

This administration has been lying to us about its tax cuts, the SEC, Homeland Security, 9/11, and Iraq. The foundation for its domestic policy has become an obsession with terrorists. We are not actually fighting a war against terrorism, which would require attacking its causes rather than its effects. If we wanted to eradicate terrorism rather than kill a few terrorists, we would be doing very different things, as I have explained ("Killing terrorists vs. eradicating terrorism", *Reader Weekly*, 27 September 2001, p. 10).

What the Attorney General and this administration need,

more than anything, is some sort of evidence that there actually are terrorists at work in the USA. And that remains the case, even if they have to fabricate their evidence, as may be true in this instance. Even Eisenhower was sufficiently distraught over the ascension of Castro in Cuba that he instructed the Joint Chiefs that, if the Cubans did not commit an incident to incite an invasion, they should invent one, as James Bamford, *Body of Secrets* (2001),

has disclosed.

The schemes they proposed including blowing up the Atlas rocket that would carry John Glenn into space or loading a commercial airliner with college students on a holiday and shooting it down over Cuba. The Chiefs even took satisfaction in the thought that the list of casualties would inflame the nation to rise up, demanding a military invasion of Cuba. Jack thought these guys were paranoid—which they were—and disapproved their daffy schemes. Which led them to conclude that JFK was an obstacle to fighting communism.

If the FBI was faster than a speeding bullet in reaching the scene of the Wellstone crash, which implies a cover-up, then what were they covering up? At the very least, they had a chance to secure the black box experts say the plane was probably carrying—although it was not required by law—and the cockpit voice recorder the NTSB spent a day and a half looking for, before concluding it did not exist. It may have been taken by the FBI.

So there are advantages to being on the scene right away, even if getting there in time might entail certain risks of discovery. Who would bother to think about

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the precise time the FBI reached the crash scene in the midst of all of that confusion and concern? or what time it had reached Duluth and rented a car? or what time it had departed for the northland from Minneapolis/St. Paul? If they had not reached the scene on time, they would have lost the chance to seize or affect whatever could give the game away.

Having studied the death of JFK for more than a decade, however, I might have become a bit paranoid myself. Even if elementary considerations and simple addition prove that the FBI knew the crash was going to occur before the plane had taken off, that does not explain why this man was targeted. As in other cases of the discovery of a corpse, it is possible to know that a man is dead without knowing how he was killed, much less why.

The how looks increasingly as though the plane was brought down by the use of EMP, as I had originally proposed ("What happened to Paul Wellstone?", *Reader Weekly*, 28 November 2002, pp. 18-19). But even if that turns out to explain how it was done and why there was a complete cessation of communication concurrent with the complete loss of control, it does not explain why Wellstone was targeted for assassination. The reasons, however, as in the case of JFK, may not be very difficult to discern. They appear political in kind.

In a column published seven months before the election ("Paul Wellstone, Fighter", *The Nation*, 9 May 2002; at <http://www.thenation.com/doc.mhtml?i=20020527&s=nichols>), John Nichols advanced reasons why Paul Wellstone was "a hunted man": "Minnesota's senior senator is not just another Democrat on White House political czar Karl Rove's target list; in an election year when the Senate balance of power could be decided by the voters of a single state", Nichols wrote. "Rather, getting rid of Wellstone is a passion for Rove, Dick

Wellstone was threatening the image of the omniscient and omnipotent Bush political machine. He was in their face.

Cheney, George W. Bush and the special-interest lobbies that fund the most sophisticated political operation ever assembled by a presidential administration".

It was Wellstone's unabashed liberalism and determination to block the Bush agenda that won him so many enemies. When most Democrats were ducking for cover from the Bush political machine, Wellstone was leaping into the ring and taking them on—with gusto. The race was being read as a measure of the potential of progressive politics. "If he wins," Nichols wrote, "a blow will be struck, not just against the Bush machine but against those in the Democratic Party who argue for tepid moderation."

For years, he observes, progressives have argued that Democrats can win big only when they emphasize fundamental differences between them and Republicans on principles of social justice and economic fair play. Wellstone understood that it is a huge mistake to back away from the "liberal" label. With which I agree. Democracy, after all, is a liberal idea. Liberals believe that everyone deserves representation, not just the rich.

Nichols also reported that Wellstone had the most consistent record of opposing Bush administration initiatives of any member of the Senate, according to *Congressional Quarterly*. He received 100% ratings from the AFL-CIO, American for Democratic Action, and the League of Conservation Voters. As the *Star Tribune* had described him, he was "the go-to guy to advance the causes of educators, environmentalists, consumer and labor groups, the elderly and the poor". And he is greatly missed.

As a measure of the difference it makes that his voice has been silenced, take the news from a single day, such as Saturday, as reported in the *Duluth News Tribune* (11 January 2003); and ask what Paul Wellstone would have had to say. The headline concerns a local issue, the anti-loitering ordinance, but does anyone doubt Paul Wellstone believed in the right of peaceable assembly and association? I think he would have opposed it.

On the national scene, another front-page story concerns a Bush proposal to deny some 20 million acres of wetland protection from industrial pollution as an industry effort to gut key provisions of the Clean Water Act. Wellstone understood, as this administration does not, that wetlands play a crucial role in our ecology, filtering out wastes

MORE

3-4

and nurturing sensitive links in the food chain. When the wetlands are gone, the human species will not be far behind. Wellstone would have opposed it.

In international affairs, a headline announces, "U.S. officials want Iraqi oil to help cover cost of war", which will inflame Arab opinion that America has gone to war in Iraq to help itself to that nation's natural resources. Paul Wellstone would have observed that the apparent justification for going to war in Iraq is to take control of the oil that we need to pay for a war in Iraq. But, if that is true, we don't need the oil, because we don't need a war with Iraq. It's that blatant and that stupid.

Turning to page 3, "Special interest provisions cut from security measure", where even the Republicans have been so embarrassed by their own secret machinations in passing the so-called Homeland Security bill that they are now acting to remove language that would have protected pharmaceutical companies from lawsuits for defective vaccines and broadening a provision that would have had the effect of restricting federal funding for related research to Texas A&M. Wellstone would have agreed.

As though those provisions were not outrageous enough, Republican leaders are said to have agreed "to restore language pushed by the late Sen. Paul Wellstone, D-Minn., to prohibit homeland-security contracts with American companies that have moved offshore to avoid U.S. taxes". That would hardly seem controversial, but the Bush administration is going to reserve the right to make exceptions *in the name of national security!* Wellstone would have observed that national security is rooted in economic security, which is thereby further weakened.

On page 4, "U.S. condemns North Korea for withdrawing from nuclear treaty", he would have pointed out that the United States

set a poor example for the world when it withdrew from the Kyoto Accords and its efforts to control global warming, and abandoned the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty to undertake an expensive and almost certainly ineffectual ABM system, which has undermined a half-century of arms control agreements. How can we complain when they simply emulate us?

On the Opinion page, Paul Wellstone would have agreed with Michael Hill that, but for the presence of oil, the US would not be considering—even remotely—going to war against Saddam Hussein. He would have gone further, however, to point out that our real reason for attacking Afghanistan appears to have been to construct a vast oil pipeline that the Taliban had opposed and the what has been going on in Venezuela appears to be a classic CIA destabilization operation for the sake of oil.

And he would also have agreed—most emphatically!—with Maureen Dowd that this administration is brilliant at manipulating its image to reveal only what it wants the public to see, where "(Karl) Rove and his president have a new style of class warfare—the affluent afflicting the afflicted; the ruling class enacting policies to help itself, weaving a pashmina safety net so the well-off can buy more expensive stuff they don't need." Pure Wellstone! We miss you, Paul.

On the business page, he would have deplored the Bush administration for not extending unemployment benefits for 800,000 American workers that expired between Christmas and New Year. He would have opposed a judge's ruling that required the United Airlines' union for 37,000 machinists to take a cut in pay, no doubt observing that it would be far more effective and judicious to have ordered United executives to take

massive cuts, which they can easily afford, instead.

He would also have skewered Republican complaints that Democrats are practicing class warfare, when precisely the opposite is the case. As my father taught me, the Republicans tend to accuse the Democrats of that of which they are most guilty. And he would have ridiculed the Vice President's reply that the tax cuts are not slanted toward the rich, will not adversely impact state budgets, and will not increase the federal deficit, which appeared in *The New York Times* (11 January 2003), as ludicrous claims which are provably false, as Reaganomics should have taught us.

And he would have been outspoken in denouncing Richard Perle's announcement that the US, *even without United Nations' authorization, is still going to attack Iraq*, pointing out that the US is bound to the UN by a treaty; that nations entering into that treaty renounce their right to attack other nations without UN authorization unless subject to imminent attack; that treaties have the same status under our Constitution as the Constitution itself as the supreme law of the land; and that Bush would thereby violate his oath to uphold the Constitution and have committed an obviously impeachable act (http://www.truthout.org/docs_02/011203A_perle_attack.htm).

JFK was taken out for many reasons, including his desire to cut the oil depletion allowance; to reform or abolish the Federal Reserve; and to dismantle the CIA. The mob wanted him out to regain control of its resorts and casinos in Havana, where it was running the largest money-laundering operation in the Western Hemisphere, and to get his brother, Bobby, off their backs; J. Edgar wanted to stay on as Director of the FBI; LBJ wanted to be "the president of all the people".

OVER

The Joint Chiefs resented Jack because he had not invaded Cuba against their unanimous recommendation; he had gone ahead and signed an above-ground nuclear test ban treaty with the Soviets against their unanimous opposition; and he was withdrawing our advisors from Vietnam, again contrary to their unanimous recommendation. The Chiefs had come to believe that removing JFK as the Commander-in-Chief was essential to the fight against communism.

The day after the plane crash, David Cogswell raised the question of whether Paul Wellstone could have been the victim of an assassination ("Wellstone Death: Foul Play?"; <http://david-cogswell.com/Political/Wellstone-Dead.html>). "The right-wingers have shown clearly with their veiled threats that they will stop at nothing to achieve their aims. Now they are prepared to take it

to all-out-war in Iraq. They are no longer talking about bombing some killers holed up in caves in the barren rural landscape of Afghanistan...

"Yes, the people running things are willing to kill large numbers of people. They don't like to get their hands dirty. They like to push buttons and have other people do the killing. They are far too genteel to do the dirty work. Obviously, killing is not a problem for these people. So, yes, when, when I see someone killed and I see a motive for someone to have killed him, yes, I am suspicious.

"The United States is [this was written prior to the election] one Senate seat away from total domination by the Bush-Cheney-Lott-Delay right-wing of America. The stakes are extreme. These guys play for keeps. It used to be called hard ball. It's not ball at all. It's war. It's gang war on a very large scale. . . . I am suspicious of everything I see. I see them playing games, cheating, lying and manipulating in practically every sphere. . . . Isn't it strange how many people who opposed the fascists are killed in some mysterious manner?" Strange, indeed.

Paul Wellstone was defying the odds. He was pulling away from Norm Coleman, the hand-picked candidate of Karl Rove. The differences between them could hardly have been greater. (See, for example, "20 Questions for Norm Coleman" *Reader Weekly*, 3 October 2002, pp. 10-11.) His lead by 25 October 2002

had grown to six or seven points and was increasing. He was threatening the image of the omniscient and omnipotent Bush political machine. He was in their face.

Use a small bomb. Detonate it by remote control or a pressurized device. Better yet, use that new EMP thing. No one will even think of that. Make sure you get the feds there right away to clean up the scene and secure incriminating evidence. Send someone unqualified to head up the NTSB. It has worked before. It can work again.

And let's not kid ourselves. This guy was a menace. He might have filibustered the Homeland Security Act. He also opposed us on tax cuts, the SEC, and the war on Iraq. *He wanted us to investigate 9/11!*

He had become an obstacle in the war on terrorism. Killing him set an example. In the name of national security. He had to be taken out.

Jim Fetzer, a professor of philosophy at UMD, believes the Bush administration, like the Joint Chiefs under Kennedy, has gone off the deep end and would do anything to promote its conception of national security, which just happens to coincide with the best interests of the nation's oil industry. It's a small world. (The columns to which he makes reference may be found on his web site, <http://www.assassination-science.com>.)

THE LETTERS

Wellstone crash: I was within a stone's throw of...

Professor Fetzer,

I have both read your two stories in the *Reader* and also heard you on the Duke Show concerning the suspicious events surrounding Senator Wellstone's death. Although as a rule I am usually skeptical of conspiracy theories, etc, in this instance, I think you may be onto something...

The morning of Wellstone's crash, I too was on the way to the funeral of Benny Rukavina. In fact, after the funeral when we first heard about the crash and the approximate time of the crash was reported as 10:21, I immediately thought to myself, "Jeez, I was within a couple of miles of that airport (traveling north on Hwy. #53, due west of the airport) at almost that exact moment." The reason I was sure of this, was because I arrived at the church at exactly 10:35 after picking up my mother in law who lives just two short blocks away. Having driven this route hun-

dreds of times, I know that it is exactly 10 minutes to Virginia from the Hwy #53 & #37 (to Hibbing) intersection. The airport is just a stone's throw from this intersection.

The weather, although not sunny and warm, was not freezing rain or snow either. Instead it was cloudy, hazy, with little or no wind and just above freezing. An occasional mist fell. What was happening 10,000 feet up, may have been another story, but at and near the surface there was nothing that appeared threatening in any way.

More than anything, what caused me to write you is your electromagnetic theory and how such an event could disable the plane. You see, just a few minutes prior to reaching the Hwy #53 & #37 intersection [Editor: which is within a mile or two of the airport], I distinctly remember receiving a call on my cell phone. Although I have received calls on my cell phone before that have had bad reception and barely audible, this call was in a league of its own. When I answered it, what I heard sounded like a cross between a roar and a

loud humming noise. The noise seemed to be oscillating and I could not make out any words being spoken. Instead, just this loud, grotesque, sometimes screeching and humming noise.

Since then, I have discovered that a friend of mine who I had tried to call earlier that morning, said he returned my call that morning and left me a message. He said his message was something like, "Another gloomy day in NE Minnesota!" Little did he know how gloomy it was about to get! Strangely, I never did receive his message on my voicemail; however, and to prove my point about receiving the call will go back through my old cell phone records to see the exact time when the incoming call came in, if you think there is good reason to do so [Editor: which he has now confirmed came in at 10:18 that morning]. Could an EMP type event cause this to happen to a cell phone within a few miles of the immediate area?

John Ongaro
Duluth

Reader

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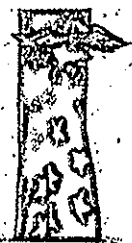
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WHERE IS BIN LADEN?
WHAT'S UP WITH THE NORTH KOREAN CANDOR?
WHERE IS SADDAM KEEPING HIS NUKE ARSENAL?
WILL AMERICANS SUPPORT WAR ON IRAQ?
DO THEY SEE HOW THESE MANIACS ARE IN CALLOOTS?

WHAT IF
THIS GLOBE



7-16-17

Paul Wellstone: the use of futuristic weaponry?

A recent Reader (16 January 2003, p. 4) included a letter to me from John Ongaro, who described an unusual experience he had en route to the funeral that Paul Wellstone had planned to attend when his plane crashed, taking not only his life but the life of his wife, six of his aides, and two pilots. The plane was highly reliable, the weather was not a problem, and the pilots appear to have been well-qualified.

John's description of the weather (neither sunny and warm, but with no freezing rain or snow, but generally cloudy, just above

freezing, and hazy with little or no wind), coincides extremely closely with the depictions and photographs given by Steve Filipovitch and printed in the Reader (2 January 2003, front cover and pp. 16-18). There is no basis for early reports that freezing rain was a contributing factor, as an earlier column has explained (28 December 2002, pp. 18-19).

These circumstances force us to take seriously possibilities we might prefer not to confront on moral, political, or personal grounds. If the more obvious

hypotheses, such as mechanical problems, pilot errors, and bad weather, cannot account for the evidence, then other, more sinister, hypotheses require consideration, such as that the crash may have been caused by a small bomb, a gas canister, or EMP weaponry.

Electro-magnetic pulse weaponry may initially sound exotic, but there are reasons to take it seriously. Ongaro wrote to explain exactly what what had happened to him. "Just a few minutes prior to reaching the Hwy #53 and #37 intersection [which is within a mile or two of the airport], I distinctly remember receiving a call on my cell phone. Although I have received calls on my cell phone before that have had bad reception and [have been] barely audible, this call was in a league of its own.

"When I answered it, what I heard sounded like a cross between a roar and a loud humming noise. The noise seemed to be oscillating and I could not make out any words being spoken. Instead, just this loud, grotesque, sometimes screeching and humming noise. . . . [John has confirmed that he received an incoming call at 10:18 AM on the morning of 25 October 2002, shortly before the crash.] Could an EMP type event cause this to happen to a cell phone within a few miles of the immediate area?" Indeed, the answer appears to be, "Yes".

As Major Scott Merkle explained in an issue of *Military Intelligence* (<http://www.fax.org/ftp/agency/army/ra/doc/usale/mlpb/1997-1/merkle.htm>) published in 1997, the existence of these "Goldeneye"-like pulse weapons, first became a reality in the early 1960s. While testing hydrogen bombs in outer space, hundreds of miles above the planet, American and Soviet scientists discovered that each atomic blast created a pulse of electromagnetic energy similar to conventional radio-made microwaves, but with energy so great that they erased magnetic memories and melted



Jim Fetzer

Reader Weekly

the microscopic junctions in transistors on the Earth below." This lead to a surge in military development of their use as sophisticated electromagnetic pulse (EMP) weaponry.

Indeed, another instance that may exemplify the use of EMP on a civilian target occurred about

Iraq, Saddam Hussein and his forces will be instant guinea pigs for a new generation of US weapons which may be used for the first time in all-out war. . . .

"In the years since the last Gulf War it has emerged that America's so-called smart bombs were not as precise or as plenty as the world had been led to believe. This time the US and its weaponry have to be smarter—if Washington wants world acceptance of its role in Iraq during and after a war, it cannot afford to trash the country and its civilian infrastructure as it did last time.

"Which is where a new suite of US weapons will come into their own. These are high-powered microwave devices, 'directed energy' weapons that the US hopes can be used to render a fleet of army vehicles useless by destroying their ignition or fuel systems. They will also cause disorientating pain—but apparently no lasting damage—by playing with nerve-ends in the enemy's skin." (www.smh.com.au/arti-

"Existence of these 'Goldeneye'-like pulse weapons first became a reality in the early 1960s."

30 miles northeast of Nashville on 6 July 2001 at 10:45 AM CST, where a mysterious power surge killed dozens of birds and damaged transmitters, phone lines, and computer equipment at country music radio station, WJFK (1090 AM). The residents of Williamson County were shaken by this occurrence, which had effects that were experienced over a large part of the county. Their disturbing accounts have been chronicled at <http://www.greatdreams.com/1090w/jkm.htm>.

More recently, Paul McGeough of *The Sydney Morning Herald* (4 January 2003) of Sydney, Australia, has confirmed reports that the United States has new high-tech weapons to unleash against the Iraqis in order to save American lives. "If the fighting starts in

[cles/2003/01/03/1041566227384.html](http://www.smh.com.au/articles/2003/01/03/1041566227384.html)).

EMP weapons for military use appear to have been operational at least since 1997: "On 15 December 1997 Raytheon TI Systems (formerly Texas Instruments Defense Systems & Electronics) announced that its AGM-154A JSOW [which is a nonnuclear EMP weapon] has been recommended by the Navy for fleet release. In a report released on October 9, the Navy's Operational Test and Evaluation Force found JSOW to be operationally effective, operationally suitable and recommended it for fleet release" (<http://www.deepspace4.com/pages/science/emplempwarheads.htm>).

A Lt. General's Congressional testimony on 17 June 1997 also affirms the adaptability of such

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devices to take out aircraft: "These weapons can interfere with the takeoff and landing of planes. They can bring an airplane down. . . . They can effect the national power grid, anything that has got an electronic chip in it, a circuit board, any piece of electronic gear that is touched by one of these weapons."

And, they come either as narrow beam over long distances, or ultra-high beam, ultra-wide beam, ultra-wide beam weapons that can project greater rates of power (<http://sun.soc.nyu.edu/copy/other/schwel.htm>).

Even TIME magazine's web site has reported on their availability:

America's Ultra-Secret Weapon

By Mark Thompson
 Posted Sunday, 19 January 2003; 10:31 AM EST

"If there's a second Gulf War, get ready to meet the high-power microwave. HPMs are man-made lightning bolts crammed into cruise missiles. . . . HPMs fry the sophisticated computers and electronic gear necessary to produce, protect, store and deliver such agents. The powerful electromagnetic pulses can travel into deeply buried bunkers."

"The HPM is a top-secret program, and the Pentagon wants to keep it that way. Senior military officials have dropped hints about a new, classified weapon for Iraq but won't provide details. Still, information about HPMs, first successfully tested in 1999, has trickled out. 'High-power microwave technology is ready for the transition to active weapons in the US military,' Air Force Colonel Eileen Walling wrote in a rare, unclassified report on the program three years ago. 'There are signs that microwave weapons will represent a revolutionary concept for warfare, principally because microwaves are designed to incapacitate equipment rather than humans.' (<http://www.time.com/time/covers/1101030127/hmlero.html>).

It may not remain "top secret" for long. Even *The New York Times* (2 February 2003) has reported that the war with Iraq is going to be fought using these sophisticated weapons, almost in passing as an aside: "Although some experimental weapons are expected to be used—including high-powered-microwave weapons that could flash millions of watts of electricity to cripple Iraqi computer and equipment—the air campaign would shut down but not destroy important city services, like water and electricity, so they could more easily be restarted to minimized public health problems."

Phil Ratto' has drawn thoughtful comparisons with the Carnahan crash, raising many questions about the similarities between the events, including that they were both on final landing approach when they veered off and dove into the ground; that both had loss of communication coincident upon the loss of control; that both could be explained by the use of EMP weaponry; that their Senate seats were crucial to Republican control; and that Carol Camrady, a former employee of the CIA, led both NTSB investigations. (The use of EMP in the Carnahan case may even have been captured by radar weather maps. See

And it is ridiculous on its face to suppose that a herbicide strong enough to destroy coca fields should have no ill-effects. Ironically, the US Embassy in Colombia had just circulated materials to reporters, noting the "precise geographical coordinates" used to spray coca fields. According to embassy officials, a computer program sets precise flight lines with a 170-foot width, leaving little room for error" (http://www.americas.org/news/nlr/20001210_herbicide_douses_us_senatoraca.sp).

As though one close call were not remarkable enough, bombs were found at

Thursday hours before the US officials flew into Barrancabermeja alongside the road leading from the airport to the town. The land mines each carried a 6.6-pound explosive charge, were attached to cables and a detonator and were ready to be set off. "If the bomb had gone off, it could have caused immense damage," Villar said. "It would have spread shrapnel over a wide area and could have taken out 10 or 15 people." (<http://abcnews.go.com/sections/world/DailyNews/columbia001201.html>).

Wellstone, displaying his knack for standing up to political pressure, was one of a handful of senators opposing a \$1.3 billion US aid plan ostensibly directed against drug trading in Colombia and said he would insist that Colombia get no more US aid until it improved its human rights record. Ratto' has observed that the herbicide, through its links with acrylamide, might have induced Wellstone's MS. Mercury poisoning appears to have MS, Parkinson's, and ALS among its effects. Maybe they had killed him, just not fast enough.

Jim Fetzer, a professor of philosophy at UMD, has become convinced by his investigations that Paul Wellstone was taken out for political reasons, and that his death thus properly qualifies as an assassination.

EMP Weapons for Military Use appear to have been Operational at Least since 1997

"Carnahan Crash EMP?" and related links at <http://www.assassination-science.com>.

Ratto' believes—and I agree—that both tragedies deserve further scrutiny and objective investigation by authorities not controlled by the US government. "Political insiders know that a number of US Congressmen and US Senators suspect that both Wellstone and Carnahan were assassinated but are afraid to speak out", Ratto' remarks. "They are afraid for their lives because of the anthrax attacks on two Democratic US Senators [Tom Daschel and Patrick Leahy] and the assassination of two more Democratic US Senators. As FDR remarked, 'There are no coincidences in politics.'"

It should also be observed that Senator Wellstone had experienced two close calls during visits to South America in recent years. On a fact-finding trip to Columbia, Wellstone was doused with herbicide while he was observing a Columbian National Police demonstration. According to Weekly News Update on the Americas, which reported it, "Wellstone and other members of his delegation were hit with a fine spray of the herbicide glyphosate from a helicopter flying less than 200 feet above them."

"Just before the incident, Lt. Col. Marcos Pederos, the police official in charge of the spraying mission, had assured Wellstone the spray posed no risk to humans, animals or the environment." That seems to be false. Glyphosate has causal links to acrylamide, which turns out to be a potent nerve toxin in humans that can bring about the translocation of mercury toxins stored in the fat cells of the body to cross the blood-brain barrier and poison brain cells, according to a recent medical report (<http://www.1-sts.org.uk/acrylamide.php>).

crucial locations as Senator Wellstone continued his visit to the small town of Barrancabermeja. Although American authorities denied that the Senator or the US Ambassador to Colombia, Anne Patterson, who accompanied him, were targeted for assassination, suggesting it was merely a "coincidence", Police Colonel José Miguel Villar said Wellstone and Patterson were the most likely targets.

According to ABCNews.com, which reported the story, "Villar said two shrapnel-wrapped land mines were found on

POVERTY WATCH compiled by Philip Kern/Reader Weekly
 (reports from area services for the week of February 8-14)

Agency	Shelter Beds filled	Meals provided	Households provided groceries	Number provided other services
CHUM	274	136	112	
Union Gospel Mission	1,724	40	40	
Loaves and Fishes	188	375		
Safe Haven Shelter				183
For Battered Women	183	549		
Life House	56	139		
Salvation Army	179	230	35	49
LSS	133	205		180
Domiano Center		1,469		461
Do. CO. WIC			144	
Northwest WI Comm. Service	234	430	49	
CASDA	56	126	3	6
Weekly Totals	1,303	5,383	383	919
January Totals	5,787	23,528	1,457	4,094
4th Qtr. Totals	18,410	70,530	5,411	12,787
3rd Qtr. Totals	17,222	71,413	4,824	12,069
2nd Qtr. Totals	15,272	64,899	5,873	11,876

*Shelter beds provided refers to the number of beds provided in the given week; one person using a bed for seven nights will count as seven beds. *Other Services provided may include case management, donations of furniture, blankets, clothing, financial assistance, emotional support, etc.
 *Send your comments to the Reader Weekly or Philip.Kern@centurytel.net.

NTSB ends fact-finding in Wellstone crash

Officials aren't expected to issue a final report on the fatal accident until late this year.

By Tony Kennedy
Star Tribune Staff Writer

The National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) has completed its major fact-finding in the plane crash that killed Sen. Paul Wellstone, an NTSB spokesman said Tuesday.

But, the next phase of the investigation — producing a final report that includes a proposed probable cause and proposed safety recommendations — could stretch past the one-year anniversary of the Oct. 25 accident. NTSB spokesman Paul Schlamm said the timing of the final report isn't easily predicted, but final reports in other major investigations have been produced 12 to 14 months after the accident.

On Tuesday, the NTSB made public its study of the navigational aid at the Eveleth-Virginia Municipal Airport, a subject previously mentioned because a post-accident check flight found the instrument slightly out of tolerance with Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) guidelines.

The NTSB reported that the nonprecision VOR radio beacon at Eveleth-Virginia has been characterized as a "rough facility" because ore in the surrounding ground has been known to affect its signal. But after several post-accident flight checks of the system, the NTSB reported no serious problems finding the runway.

"In all cases the VOR delivered the aircraft to a position relative to the runway appropriate for a normal transition

to landing," the report said. If Wellstone's chartered airplane flew off course because of VOR problems, that misdirection alone wouldn't explain why the plane crashed. That's because the Eveleth-Virginia VOR provides only lateral guidance to a runway's centerline, not guidance for descending during the approach.

Still, the VOR report is of keen interest to Aviation Charter Inc., the air charter company that operated Wellstone's flight, which also killed the plane's two pilots, Richard Conry and Michael Guess, and five others.

Previous NTSB reports have noted that the pilots were flying below recommended speeds on the plane's final approach to the airport, raising the possibility of pilot error as the cause of the crash.

When investigators offer a probable cause in their final report, the NTSB will vote on it, Schlamm said.

Eden Prairie-based Aviation Charter has filed notification that it might sue the state of Minnesota for not precisely maintaining the VOR equipment at the Eveleth-Virginia airport. The state Department of Transportation's Office of Aeronautics maintains VOR transmitters at a dozen small airports in Minnesota.

Wellstone's plane was heading for an east-to-west landing on the Eveleth-Virginia runway when it veered south without making a distress call. The twin-turboprop King Air A100 crashed about two miles southeast of the runway. NTSB investigators found no mechanical problems with the plane, which was destroyed by the impact and fire.

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tonyk@startribune.com

(Indicate page, name of newspaper, city and state.)

STAR TRIBUNE

Date: Minneapolis, Minnesota

Title: 04/30/2003

Character:
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149A-MP-62632
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(Indicate page, name of newspaper, city and state.)

STAR TRIBUNE

Date: Minneapolis, Minnesota
Edition:

06/3/2003

Title:

Character:
or
Classification: 149A-MP-62632
Submitting Office:

Indexing:

(Handwritten initials)

An official investigation has focused on pilot error and weather. Some observers still have suggested a political plot.

Findings don't slow conspiracy theories on Wellstone crash

By Kevin Diaz
Star Tribune Washington Bureau Correspondent

WASHINGTON, D.C. — When federal investigators released a report last month about the plane crash that killed Sen. Paul Wellstone, some members of Congress hoped it would dispel talk that his plane was sabotaged.

It didn't. In Internet chat groups, political Web sites and the published reports of several leftist academics, conspiracy theories about Wellstone's death last October maintain a life of their own, particularly in northern Minnesota.

In one nasty exchange, a retired prosecutor from Duluth has threatened to take legal action against a University of Minnesota-Duluth philosophy professor who espouses the belief that the Bush White House had a hand in Wellstone's demise.

The former prosecutor, Thomas Bieter, alleges that the professor, Kennedy-assassination theorist James Fetzer, has committed "criminal defamation" by publishing articles suggesting a government coverup of the crash investigation.

CRASH continues on A7:
— A final NTSB report is months away.



Thomas Bieter has started a chat group critical of conspiracy talk.



James Fetzer has suggested a government coverup of the probe.

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Wellstone associates say they have done nothing to encourage such speculation, which some fear could trivialize the senator's political legacy and turn his memory into a morbid pop culture story.

"It's not productive," former Wellstone aide Allison Dobson said. "We're very anxious to get to the bottom of the crash, but at the same time, this sort of thing seems like chasing one's own tail. . . . We have every confidence that the NTSB and the FBI are doing their work well."

But a final report by the NTSB (National Transportation Safety Board) is months away.

Left-wing theories

When a prominent political figure dies suddenly, it isn't uncommon for rumors and speculation to spring to life. When White House lawyer Vince Foster committed suicide in 1993, for example, right-wing groups alleged that he was murdered and that then-President Clinton and First Lady Hillary Clinton covered it up.

In Wellstone's case, suspicions surfaced within days of the Oct. 25 crash near the Eveleth-Virginia Municipal Airport that killed him, his wife, Sheila, their daughter Marcia, three staffers and both pilots operating the chartered Beechcraft King Air A100 airplane.

In an Oct. 28 article published on an alternative journalism Web site under the title "Was Paul Wellstone Murdered?" Buffalo State College journalism professor Michael Niman wrote, "There is no indication today that Wellstone's death was the result of foul play. What we do know, however, is that Wellstone emerged as the most visible obstacle standing in the way of a draconian political agenda by an unelected government. And now he is conveniently gone."

In the article, posted on AlterNet.org, the professor expressed surprise that Wellstone had "lived this long."

Niman's article was also followed by a number of similar pieces in the left-wing press, notably one by syndicated cartoonist and commentator Ted Rall speculating that Wellstone was killed so Republicans could regain control of the Senate. "Did government gangsters murder the United States' most liberal legislator?" Rall wrote in a column Oct. 29.

Rall's piece has since become fodder for discussion — and condemnation — on a number of Web sites.

The column was followed by a piece by ex-Los Angeles police officer and journalist Michael Ruppert, who concluded in his political newsletter, From the Wilderness, that top Democratic officials are twice as likely to die in plane crashes as Republicans.

Ruppert, best known for his accusations of alleged CIA drug trafficking, called the history of plane crashes culminating in Wellstone's death "too full of coincidences."

'Conspiratorialists'

The official Washington investigation has focused on a combination of pilot error and northern Minnesota weather.

Rep. Jim Oberstar of Duluth, the top Democrat on the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, said the joint FBI and NTSB investigation has raised enough questions about the two pilots' approach in low cloud cover to put aside the theories of "conspiratorialists."

"Every allegation regarding sabotage was fully investigated, and the NTSB came up with no evidence of that," said Mary Kerr, Oberstar's press aide.

But the cause of the crash is still far from settled in arti-

cles and Internet discussions involving Fetzer, the Duluth philosophy professor who won a \$100,000 McKnight Foundation grant in 1996 for his work in the philosophy of science.

Fetzer, an ex-Marine who has published several books and papers about the JFK assassination, opened the first of six articles in the Duluth Reader Weekly about the Wellstone crash by saying, "Conspiracies are as American as apple pie."

Discounting weather, pilot error or mechanical problems in Wellstone's flight, Fetzer's articles have seized on the possibility of sabotage brought on by a futuristic electromagnetic pulse weapon that he said could have disabled the plane's computerized components.

Evidence for this, he said in an interview, was the absence of any distress call from the pilots and the odd cell-phone 'experience' reported by St. Louis County lobbyist John Ongaro.

Ongaro, who was near the airport when Wellstone's plane went down, has dismissed the significance of his experience, in which he said his cell phone made "strange" sounds and then disconnected.

"It's not unusual for cell phones to cut out, especially in northern Minnesota," he said.

Fetzer's articles rely less on hard evidence of any kind of murder plot than on arguing that the investigators' findings don't add up.

More provocative than Fetzer's theories about how Wellstone's plane went down are his conclusions about who was responsible:

"When I suggest Republicans may have been involved," he wrote in the Reader, "I do not mean the average GOP voter. I mean the troika that runs the government, consisting of Dick Cheney, Karl Rove and Donald Rumsfeld."

A White House spokesman said he had no comment about Fetzer's allegations. Fetzer's theories do not implicate Sen. Norm Coleman, R-Minn., who was running against Wellstone when he died. Two Coleman aides dismissed Fetzer's accusations privately but declined to make any public comment.

Fetzer's theories have caught the attention of retired St. Louis County prosecutor Thomas Bieter, who has started a critical Internet chat group called FETZERclaims-DEBUNK.

Much of the give-and-take on the Web site has been between Fetzer and Bieter, who once took a philosophy course from Fetzer and considered him a friend. The two are now bitter antagonists.

Bieter has threatened to take his case to his former colleagues at the St. Louis County attorney's office.

Chief prosecutor John DeSanto said his office would be unlikely to get involved. But that has not deterred Bieter, who said Fetzer could face civil sanctions as well.

"I simply think it's irresponsible to publish articles accusing Republicans, the FBI and the NTSB of an assassination coverup before the investigation has even been completed," Bieter said.

Fetzer said he has not spoken out about the Wellstone death as a university professor but as a private citizen.

"This is not done off the top of my head," he said. "I'm not just interested in stirring up some . . . storm. I'm interested in the truth. If I can become convinced that I am mistaken about this, I will gladly accept that and sleep easier at night. Because, believe me, the implications of this are profoundly disturbing."

Kevin Dlaz is at kdlaz@mcclatchydc.com.

(Indicate page, name of newspaper, city and state.)

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Date: PIONEER PRESS
 Edition: St. Paul, Minnesota
 Title: (X) 100
 11/19/2003
 Character: 149A-MP-62632

Safety board blames pilot error for '02 crash

BY CHARLES LASZEWSKI and TOM WEBB
Pioneer Press

WASHINGTON, D.C.

A cascading series of mistakes by the pilots flying a plane carrying U.S. Sen. Paul Wellstone and five other passengers was responsible for the fatal crash, a yearlong investigation by the National Transportation Safety Board concluded Tuesday.

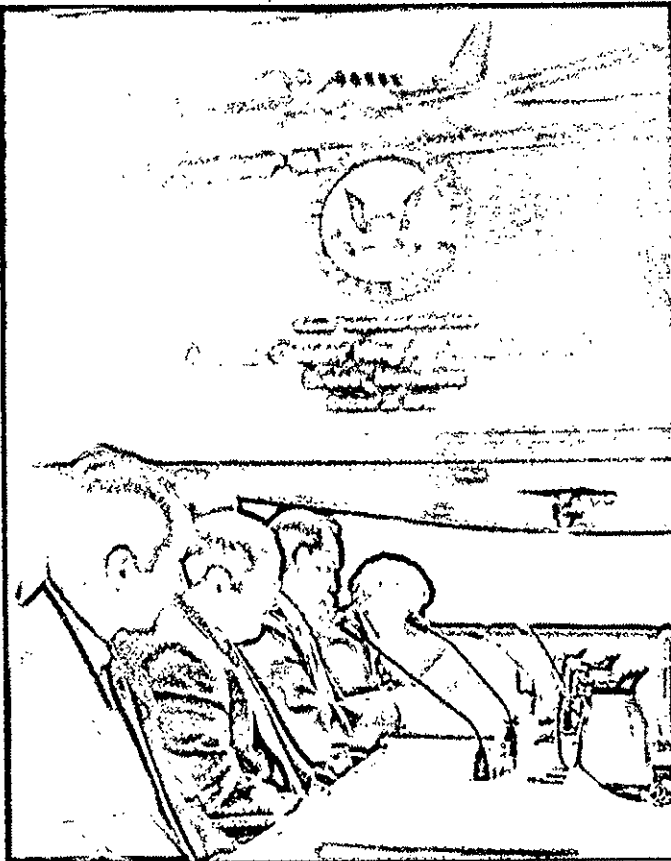
Minutes before the crash, Capt. Richard Conry and co-pilot Michael Guess missed or ignored at least two indicators that the plane was in trouble as it approached the Eveleth-Virginia Airport on Oct. 25, 2002.

Had they recognized the warning signs, the pilots should have been able to abort the landing in time to avoid the crash, the five-member board unanimously agreed.

Instead, the Beech King Air A100 turboprop fell short of the runway and crashed into a swamp two miles south of the airport, bursting into flames. Investigators said that because of the pilots' mistakes, the aircraft failed to maintain "adequate airspeed, which led to an aerodynamic stall from which they did not recover."

"This is a tragic accident that really shouldn't have happened," said NTSB chief Ellen Engleman. "We find there is never one single factor, but you get a domino effect. They had several opportunities to correct and they were not able to correct."

Wellstone; his wife, Sheila; their daughter, Marcia Wellstone Markuson; and campaign workers Mary McEvoy, Tom Lopic and WIL McLaughlin left St. Paul's downtown airport at 9:37 a.m. for Eveleth, where they



RON EDMONDS, ASSOCIATED PRESS

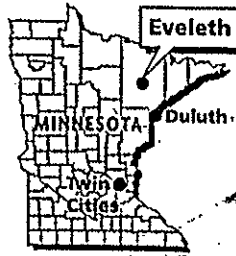
National Transportation Safety Board investigators in Washington on Tuesday discuss their findings in the crash that killed U.S. Sen. Paul Wellstone and seven others.

CRASH REPORT, 4A

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149A-MP-62632-35

Investigators detail crash of Wellstone flight



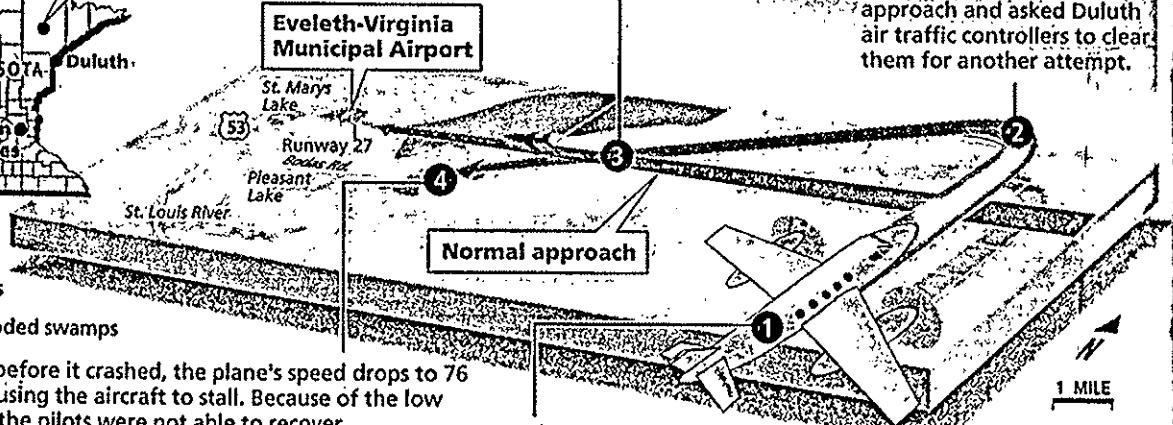
KEY
 Bogs
 Wooded swamps

Seconds before it crashed, the plane's speed drops to 76 knots, causing the aircraft to stall. Because of the low altitude, the pilots were not able to recover.

Compiled by staff writer Tom Majeski
 Source: National Transportation Safety Board.

At five miles out, the plane intercepts a VOR signal for runway 27. Rather than make a right turn to stay on the proper heading, the aircraft continues flying to the southwest. Low airspeed likely triggered a stall warning device to go off.

Pilots fly a mile beyond the normal approach path before turning west. At this point, investigators say, they should have declared a missed approach and asked Duluth air traffic controllers to clear them for another attempt.



The Beechcraft King Air A100 approaches airport from the south. Investigators said it was traveling too fast and could not make a normal turn toward runway 27.

TIM MONTGOMERY / PIONEER PRESS

were to attend a friend's funeral before going on to a campaign stop in Duluth. The plane crashed at 10:22 a.m.

Board member Richard Healing commended NTSB investigators for their efforts to determine what caused the plane to go down. But he lamented that no one may ever know how the pilots missed the red flags or why they failed to make the proper adjustments.

"We don't know why," Healing said. "It's quite speculative." Cockpit voice recorders and flight data recorders are not required in planes like the King Air A100.

10 MILES OF DISASTER

NTSB investigators used radar tracking data and simulations of the flight's final moments to piece together a moment-by-moment re-creation of the accident as the plane approached Eveleth.

From about 10 miles out, everything seemed to go wrong:

At about 10:10 a.m. — or 12 minutes before the crash — the plane was traveling too fast to properly extend the landing gear. While flying at 3,500 feet above sea level, the crew shifted the aircraft's engine toward idle to reduce speed and get the wheels down.

As the plane neared Eveleth at 10:18, it swung too far north and was not properly lined up for a final approach to the runway.

By 10:20 the pilots had seemingly overcome that mistake and were back on target for the runway. But the plane again drifted off course, this time to the south. It was so wide of the mark that the pilots should have aborted the landing and tried again.

Less than a minute later, the plane's approach speed dropped below the recommended 130 knots and continued to fall, an event that also should have triggered a decision to abort the landing. When the speed fell to 76 knots, the plane stalled, veered sharply left and crashed.

NTSB investigator Charlie Pereira said that scenario was "consistent with a stall and loss of control." Unless the airport was in sight and the landing gear was down, "the airplane should never have been flown below 130 knots," he said.

John Clark, NTSB director of the Office of Aviation Safety, speculated that Conry and Guess may have lost track of the plane and let it go off course while trying to correct the earlier problems they created involving excessive speed and the landing gear.

Johanne Conry, wife of the pilot, sat in the second row of the hearing room, listening to nearly all 90 minutes of the meeting. After hearing investigators criticize her husband's flying abilities, she walked out of the room, appearing upset and leaning on a friend's arm. She declined to answer any questions from reporters.

FLIGHT COMPANY PROBLEMS

The board also was critical of Charter Aviation, the Eden Prairie company that owned the plane and provided the training for Conry and Guess.

Board investigators said the company had standard operating procedures, but many of its pilots were unaware of them. Had Conry and Guess been following those procedures, they would have maintained an approach speed of 130 knots and aborted the landing after the plane veered off course the second time.

The board also said the two pilots failed to work as a team and back each other up when problems arose, a finding the board blamed on inadequate training. Charter Aviation had an approved training unit designed

to help pilots acquire those skills, but the company's ground school used only a part of it. Also, the pilots were not required to do simulations on the techniques, according to the board.

The result was the pilots were not paying enough attention to the aircraft's instruments. If they had, said NTSB's Bill Bramble, "at least one of them" would have observed the plane was in danger.

Finally, there was no mechanism for pilots to file anonymous reports alerting the company's management to pilots who lacked skills or showed lapses in judgment. That was

especially significant in Conry's case. Investigators said quick action by his co-pilots saved previous flights on which Conry had made serious mistakes.

Roger and Shirley Wikner, owners of Aviation Charter, could not be reached for comment after the hearing Tuesday. In August, Aviation Charter and several related companies agreed to a \$25 million settlement from the crash to be divided among the families of the Wellstones and their aides. The companies admitted no wrongdoing.

"Aviation Charter has reached a settlement that is acceptable to all parties and

therefore chooses not to comment on the NTSB findings," said Michael Lindberg, an attorney representing the Wikners.

Jeff Blodgett, Wellstone's campaign manager at the time of the crash, said the NTSB report was "extremely painful and disturbing" to him and others at Wellstone Action, the organization formed to carry on the work of Paul and Sheila Wellstone.

"It is now crystal clear that the crash didn't have to happen and never should have happened," Blodgett said. "Those two pilots never should have been allowed to fly people in that plane, and I do hope there's

some accountability for those who let those pilots fly.

"As a customer, when you hire a company, you expect that the pilots carrying this precious cargo are highly qualified to safely carry people," he said. "And that was not the case here. And it's very painful to find that out after the fact."

He said "there are major questions about the training, background and credibility of the pilots, and questions about the management of those pilots." He added, "It's deeper than a mistake in midair. It's overwhelming."

The Wellstones' sons, David

and Mark, were not available for comment.

RULED OUT

Overcast conditions, low visibility and light rain the morning of the flight might also have contributed to the crash. Low clouds might have prevented them from seeing the landing strip, said Frank Hilldrup, the investigator-in-charge.

There were reports of freezing rain in the area. But for the last four minutes and 23 seconds of the flight, the plane was in an area where ice should not have accumulated on the plane's wings and did not affect its performance during descent, the board concluded. At most, if there was light ice on the wing's leading edge, the plane would have been slightly more susceptible to stalling at low speeds. But the aircraft already was in trouble, Pereira said.

The board also dismissed pilot fatigue as a factor, even though Conry had worked a nursing job and flown an early-morning charter flight during the past two days.

Also ruled out were equipment problems. All parts of the aircraft were well maintained and working properly. The airport's radio beacon was fine within five miles of the runway and was not a contributing factor, either, the board concluded.

Most aeronautics experts contacted by the Pioneer Press on Tuesday said the NTSB investigation appeared to be thorough and its conclusions of pilot error are reasonable.

"It sounds like a classic behind-the-airplane scenario and they lost track of what was important," said Eric Doten, director of the Center for Aerospace Safety and Security Education at Embry-Riddle Aeronautics University in Florida. "They should have gone around, gathered their thoughts and then done it right."

In fact, Conry once told a friend that he was uncomfortable flying the King Air because he was unable to keep up with everything he should be doing in the cockpit.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The board also saved some criticism for the Federal Avi-

ation Administration. The agency inspected Aviation Charter but failed to detect the training lapses cited in the NTSB report. Nor did FAA inspectors fly with the company's pilots.

Les Door, an FAA spokesman, defended the agency's Minneapolis office and said it conducted its inspections of the company properly and on or ahead of schedule.

The NTSB recommended that the FAA make four changes to prevent future accidents:

- Include in-air and ground school inspections.
- Require more cockpit management training for all charter companies that staff flights with a pilot and co-pilot.
- Determine whether planes could be equipped with warning systems that sound an alarm when speeds drop to dangerous levels.

■ Establish procedures for using such systems if they are found to be feasible.

The board also renewed its recommendation that video cameras be required in the cockpits of planes. Such equipment would be especially important in smaller planes like the Beech King Air 100 and others that are not required to have flight data or cockpit voice recorders.

The board's conclusions and recommendations did not satisfy everyone, particularly those who have circulated speculation on the Internet and elsewhere that Wellstone's plane was sabotaged to prevent his re-election.

One of the most prominent proponents of that argument is James Fetzer, a philosophy professor at the University of Minnesota-Duluth.

"My position is that this crash was not an accident, that the motives appear to have been political and that the White House may have been involved," Fetzer said Tuesday.

He discounted the NTSB conclusion that pilot error caused the crash. Instead, he suspects, the plane was brought down by a "modern electromagnetic-type weapon whose existence is generally not known to the public."

Tom Majeski and Jim Ragsdale contributed to this report. Charles Laszewski can be reached at claszewski@pioneerpress.com or 651-228-5458. Tom Webb can be reached at twebb@pioneerpress.com or 202-383-6049.

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(Indicate page, name of newspaper, city and state.)

STAR TRIBUNE

Date:
 Edition: Minneapolis, Minnesota

Title: 11/19/2003

Character:
 or
 Classification:
 Submitting Office:

Indexing:

149A-MP-62632

(Handwritten initials)

Off-course and too slow

By Greg Gordon
Star Tribune Washington
Bureau Correspondent

WASHINGTON, D.C. — Pilots flying too slowly on a landing approach caused the charter-plane crash that killed Sen. Paul Wellstone, the pilots and five others last year, the National Transportation Safety Board concluded Tuesday.

By voice vote, the five-member board also adopted staff findings that the pilots lacked proper training in crew coordination and were probably so inattentive or distracted that they didn't react to the speed drop until too late.

Mild icing from a light snowfall did not affect the de-

scent of the twin-prop King Air A100 before it crashed on Oct. 25, 2002, 2 miles southeast of the Eveleth-Virginia Municipal Airport in northern Minnesota, the panel concluded.

"The probable cause of the accident was the flight crew's failure to maintain adequate airspeed, which led to an aerodynamic stall from which they did not recover," the board said.

The findings came after a 13-month investigation that included attempts to reconstruct and simulate the aircraft's flight path and trajectory before it veered to the left and crashed in the woods.

CRASH continues on A16



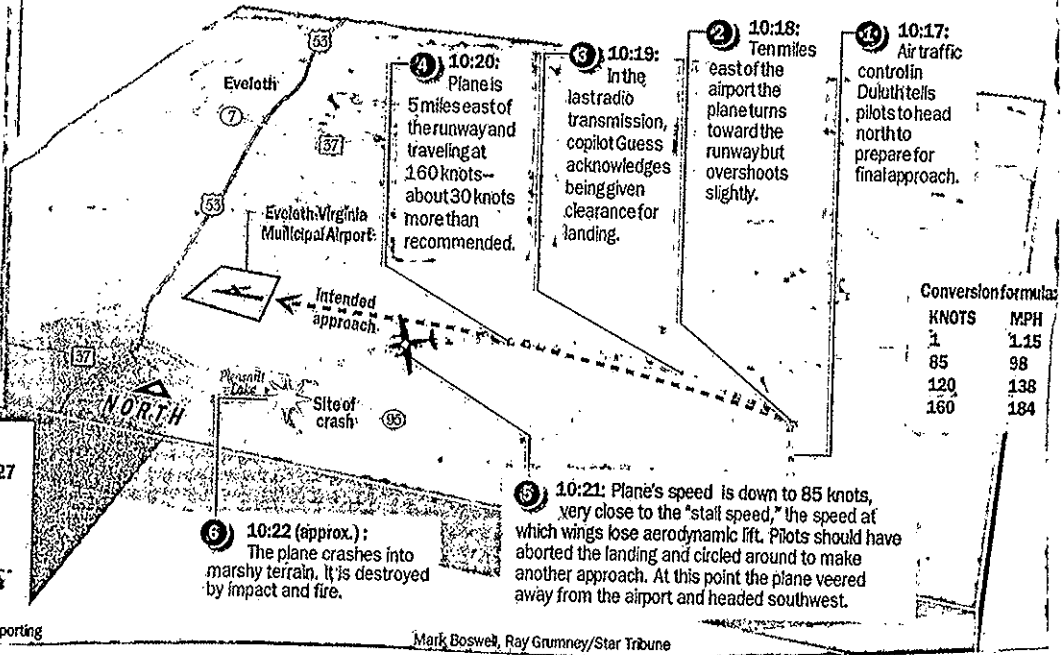
Jim Mone/Associated Press file photo
Federal investigators sifted through the debris Oct. 27, 2002. The National Transportation Safety Board blamed pilot error for the accident that killed eight.

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THE FINAL MINUTES: A FAILED APPROACH

Federal investigators said Tuesday that in the final minutes of flight, the plane carrying Sen. Paul Wellstone and seven others never established a steady approach path and slowed suddenly enough to cause it to stall and fall from the sky.



Sources: NTSB final report, Star Tribune reporting

Mark Boswell, Ray Grumney/Star Tribune



Pilot: Richard Comy
Copilot: Michael Guess

PROBABLE CAUSE

The pilots failed to maintain adequate airspeed, which led to an aerodynamic stall and crash.

FINDINGS

- ▶ Both pilots had previously demonstrated "potentially serious performance deficiencies... consistent with below-average flight proficiency."
- ▶ Pilots did not follow Aviation Charter approach procedures.
- ▶ Fatigue "most likely did not degrade" their performance.
- ▶ icing did not affect the plane's performance.
- ▶ The airplane was properly licensed, equipped and maintained.
- ▶ A slightly inaccurate navigational beacon at the Eveleth airport was not a factor.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- The Federal Aviation Administration should:
- ▶ Inspect the crew training operations of charter operators as rigorously as it does those of airlines.
 - ▶ Require crew resource management training at charter carriers with two-pilot crews.
 - ▶ Consider requiring low-air-speed alert systems in charter aircraft.

The board urged the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) to tighten regulations on on-demand charter companies so they are required to conduct coordinated pilot training.

It also urged in-flight inspections of charter airlines and the appointment of an expert panel to consider requiring a low-air-speed-warning system that would give charter pilots more time to react.

NTSB Chairwoman Ellen Engleman said board investigators learned after the crash of several incidents of past "sloppiness" by captain Richard Conry, 55, who nearly caused an accident with Wellstone aboard three days before the crash. Conry and copilot Michael Guess, 30, had "a general history of below-average capability and performance," Engleman said.

Had Aviation Charter Inc., the Eden Prairie carrier that operated the flight, set up a system for colleagues to report pilot lapses anonymously, it might have produced "a red flag" for corrective action, she said.

During a 90-minute hearing, NTSB staff painted this scenario of the final approach:

➤ Heading north, the plane overshoot the westbound airport approach path by about a mile, but continued turning left and converged on the approach course.

➤ When the plane descended to 3,500 feet, its landing gear was not lowered, as is proper procedure.

➤ The plane crossed the airport approach course again 5 miles east of the airport but, inexplicably, did not pick up the course.

➤ The plane accelerated to 171 knots while descending below 2,500 feet — beyond the correct speed of 130 knots, probably forcing the pilot to lower the throttle settings to "near idle."

➤ Within 3 miles of the runway, the plane slowed to the recommended approach speed of 130 knots, then continued to lose airspeed, perhaps more rapidly when the landing gear was lowered.

➤ The last radar reading showed that the plane's speed

had dropped to 76 knots (about 87 miles per hour) — the stall level identified by its manufacturer, possibly triggering an audio stall warning inside the cockpit. At 76 knots, the airplane was about 50 knots too slow, the board concluded. Moments later, the plane veered sharply and crashed through treetops and burned.

Besides Wellstone, 59, victims included his wife, Sheila, 58; their daughter, Marcia Wellstone Markuson, 33; DFL official Mary McEvoy, 49; Wellstone campaign aides Will McLaughlin, 23, and Tom Lopic, 49, and the flight crew.

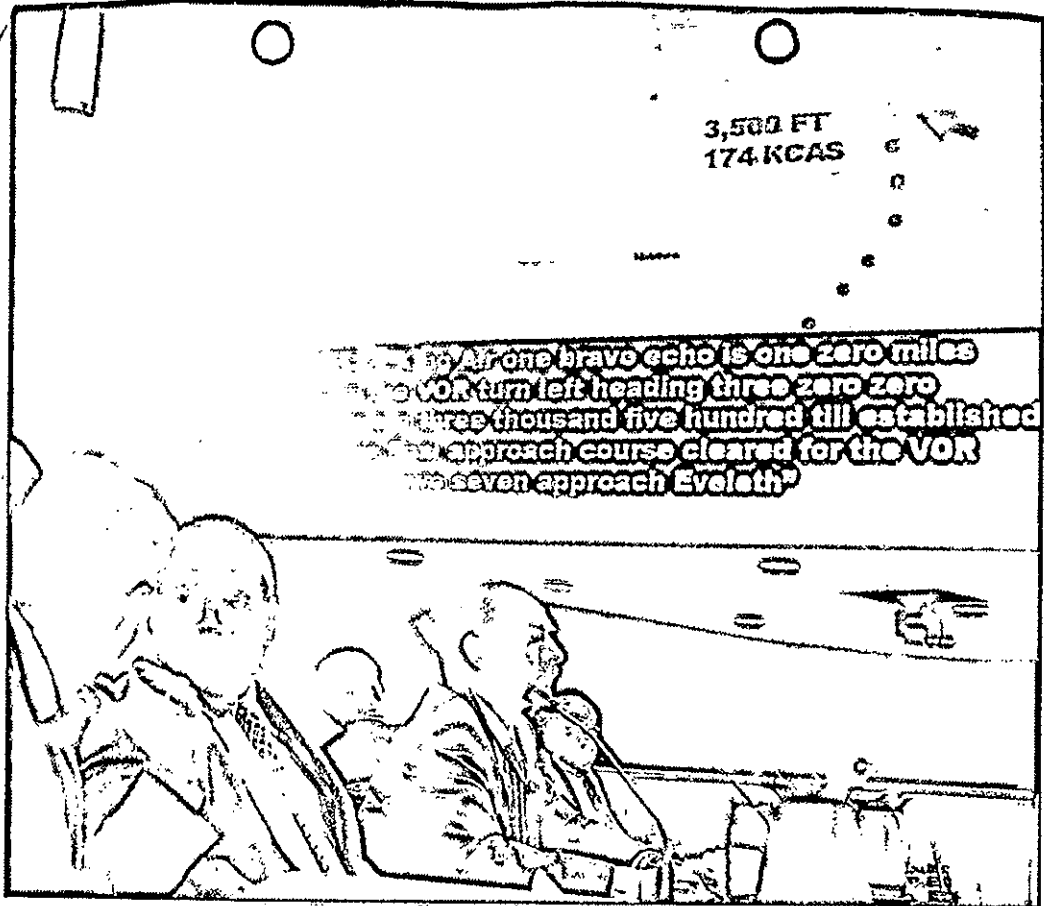
The accident, 10 days before voters were to decide whether to reelect Democrat Wellstone to a third term in the Senate, shocked the nation and may have enabled Republicans to regain control of the U.S. Senate. Republican Norm Coleman defeated former Vice President Walter Mondale, a stand-in for Wellstone, to give the GOP a one-vote Senate majority.

The board's findings, to be detailed in the coming weeks, could dispel allegations of sabotage from conspiracy theorists who have questioned the timing of the crash.

It was snowing the day of Wellstone's scheduled flight from the Twin Cities to the Iron Range for the funeral of the father of a state legislator. After checking the weather, Conry first elected not to fly. But lead investigator Frank Hilldrup told the board that Conry changed his mind after making a second call to an FAA Flight Service Station in Duluth and learning that the Eveleth airport had visibility of 4 miles.

John Clark, director of the NTSB's Office of Aviation Safety, said investigators uncovered no evidence that Conry was pressured to make the flight.

The head of a board meteorology team told the panel that the weather — moderate icing conditions between 8,000 and 11,000 feet — should not have been enough to cause the crash anyway. The plane flew through that zone in two minutes and 24 seconds, meteorologist Kevin Petty said, and air-



Ron Edmonds/Associated Press

National Transportation Safety Board investigators, from left, Charlie Pereira, Frank Hildrup and John Clark met Tuesday in Washington to discuss the crash that killed Sen. Paul Wellstone and seven others.

OTHER VICTIMS OF THE CRASH



Sheila Wellstone, 58, was the wife of Sen. Paul Wellstone.



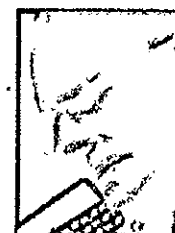
Marcla Wellstone Markuson, the couple's daughter, was 33.



Mary McEvoy, 49, was a member of the campaign staff.



Will McLaughlin, 23, an aide to Wellstone, was single.



Tom Lapic, 49, was a staff assistant on the campaign team.

craft descending below 5,000 feet would have actually been "shedding" ice.

Charlie Pereira, who headed a board team that investigated the plane's performance, said a look "at how this flight crew performed the approach sheds some light" on why the plane lost speed so rapidly in its last 90 seconds of flight.

"Before the airplane descended to 3,500 feet," he said, "the landing gear should have been lowered and the airplane slowed to 130 knots. Instead, he said, the plane hit 3,500 feet

at 156 knots and accelerated to 170 knots while descending through 2,500 feet.

"This tells us that the landing gear was still retracted," Pereira said. "Thus, for the remainder of the descent, the power would have to be at a lower-than-normal setting — near flight idle — in order for the airplane to slow and descend simultaneously.

"At about 2,200 feet . . . we believe the landing gear was lowered, and our simulations confirm that."

But the landing gear exten-

sion and the low power setting could have easily caused the plane's speed to drop sharply to stall levels, Pereira said.

He said flight crews can fail to maintain minimum airspeed "through inattention, distraction and by not adhering to standard operating procedures."

Investigators have no way of knowing if a stall warning sounded and Conry or Guess tried to react, he said, because the plane had neither a flight data recorder nor a cockpit voice recorder. They were not

required on charter aircraft.

If a warning sounded, the crew might have had up to eight seconds to add power, Pereira said, but the pilots also could have induced a stall, if they reacted by pulling back, suddenly leveling off or making a sharp right turn upon seeing the airport.

"It is also possible that a light coat of ice on the leading edge of the wings could have raised the stall speed slightly so that the stall occurred just prior to — or at about the same time — as the stall warning," Pereira said.

"One thing is clear," he said. "The flight crew did not recover from the stall. The airplane should never have been flown below 130 knots until the airport was in sight."

Board officials noted that Conry passed a flight certification test just days before the flight. The board determined that fatigue "most likely" was not a factor, although Conry's normal sleep pattern was disrupted by flying the previous day and working a Thursday night shift in his second job as a nurse.

Engleman, the NTSB chairwoman, focused on training. She said she does not consider it a "loophole" that charter airlines are not required to give coordinated crew training to their pilots, but more like a "hollow spot" that the board seeks to fill.

She also stressed the need for the FAA to regulate safety in charter operations to levels required for commercial airlines. Had the FAA conducted en-route inspections of Aviation Charter's flight operations, she said, FAA inspectors "would have known better what was, or what was not going on on-board."

FAA spokesman Les Dorr said agency officials are curious about the criticism. Aviation Charter last year received "the second-highest number of inspections" of any carrier overseen by the agency's Minneapolis Flight Standards District Office, he said.

Engleman also lamented the absence of flight recorders, which prevented the board from knowing "everything that happened in the cockpit."

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Date:
Edition:

3/17/04

Title:

Duluth News-Tribune

Character:

or
Classification:

Submitting Office:

149A-MP-62632

Indexing:

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Pilot's disorientation caused crash, NTSB reports

NEWS TRIBUNE

The decision to fly in marginal conditions helped cause the January 2003 plane crash that killed two Grand Rapids men.

Pilot Gary Prokop, 47, and James Kosak, 51, died when Prokop's Cirrus SR-22 crashed near Hill City at 6:38 a.m. on Jan. 18, 2003.

According to the final report released last month by the National Transportation Safety Board, the probable cause of the accident was "disorientation experienced by the pilot due to a lack of visual references, and a failure to maintain altitude."

"Contributing factors were the pilot's improper decision to attempt flight into marginal VFR (visual flight rules) conditions, his inadvertent flight into instrument meteorological conditions, the low lighting condition and the trees," the report concluded.

Prokop, a private pilot with 248 hours of flight time, 18.9 in the SR-22, received a VFR-only certificate for SR-22s less than five weeks before the crash.

Witness reports of weather conditions varied from mostly cloudy to clear, depending upon their location, the NTSB report said.

Prokop called the Princeton, Minn., flight service station for a weather briefing less than an hour before the flight began. He noted that Grand Rapids was overcast but that he was "hoping to slide underneath it and then climb out," said the NTSB document recording the history of the fatal flight.

One witness in Hill City reported seeing a plane that "seemed to be following the highway," flying low.

"If he'd been two blocks east, he'd had hit the water tower," the report quotes him as saying.

Other witnesses also reported seeing the plane flying low and fast before it crashed in a level, wooded area at a 15-degree, nose-down angle. Investigators found the plane's wreckage scattered over a 500-foot-long path.

"A post-accident examination of the aircraft and engine did not reveal any anomalies," the NTSB report said.

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